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MEDITATIONS
AND
CONTEMPLATIONS
ON
THE SUFFERINGS
OF
OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR
JESUS CHRIST;
IN WHICH
THE HISTORY OF THE PASSION,
AS GIVEN BY THE FOUR EVANGELISTS,
IS CONNECTED, HARMONISED, & EXPLAINED.

WITH SUITABLE PRAYERS AND OFFICES OF DEVOTION.

BY J. RAMBACH, D. D.
LATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GIESSEN.

IN THREE PARTS,
CONTAINING,

I. The Sufferings of CHRIST in the Garden, and before the Spiritual Court of the Jews.
II. His Sufferings before the Civil Tribunal of Pilate and Herod.
III. His Sufferings on Mount Golgotha

WITH AN APPENDIX,

Containing a Fast Sermon, preached at Jena, in Lent, 1721, entitled the Prince of Life condemned to death, by J. Rambach, S. T. P.

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OF THE

SUFFERINGS

OF

CHRIST

BEFORE THE CIVIL TRIBUNAL OF PILATE AND HEROD.

CONSIDERATION IV.

THE GOOD CONFESSION WHICH CHRIST MADE CONCERNING HIS KINGDOM BEFORE PONTIUS PILATE THE ROMAN GOVERNOR.

'JESUS answered, my kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: But now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, art thou a king then? Jesus answered, thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth, heareth my voice,' (John xviii. 6, 37.)

We have before observed, that the point concerning Christ's kingdom was under examination before the civil tribunal of Pilate. For the high Priests and Elders having accused our blessed Saviour of pretending to be a king, Pilate questioned him about that particular, and asked him, art thou the king of the Jews? But our blessed Lord, before he returned a direct answer to this question, put a previous question to Pilate, in order to learn what idea he had annexed to this title, the king of the Jews. Accordingly Jesus said unto Pilate, 'Sayest thou this of *thyself*, or did others tell it thee of me?' Pilate, in-

deed, seems to have resented this answer, and by another question, *viz.* 'What hast thou done?' was for putting the cause on another issue. But our blessed Saviour keeps to the essential point; and answering Pilates former question in the words which we have cited above, makes a good confession of the true nature of his kingdom.

This he does with the greatest wisdom, discretion, and foresight; so that in the first place, according to the idea which Pilate had conceived of the accusation, namely that a temporal king was therein meant, he answers the question in the negative. But on the contrary, with regard to the sense which the title of king of the Jews bears in the writings of the prophets, his answer is affirmative. By this our blessed Lord has set his suffering members a pattern of wisdom and prudence, and shews how to make proper distinctions in answering intricate, ambiguous, and ensnaring questions.

Hence it appears that this good confession of Christ concerning his kingdom consists of two parts.

In the first part of his confession, Jesus rectifies the false notion that Pilate had formed of his kingdom, and gives him to understand, that he is no temporal king.

In the second, he explains the true nature of his kingdom, and shews that he is a spiritual king.

I. In the first part of our Saviour's wise and good confession, wherein he rectifies the false idea which Pilate had of his kingdom, we may observe these three particulars.

First, He confesses that he really has a kingdom; for he expressly mentions it no less than three times in these words: 'My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world——but now my kingdom is not from hence.' With what right our blessed Lord makes this declaration, and his motives to it, we shall shew from the second part of his confession.

Secondly, He describes his kingdom, and distinguishes it from earthly kingdoms, saying, 'My kingdom is not of this world.' Our blessed Saviour does not say that his kingdom is not IN this world; for the communion of saints, who acknowledge Jesus Christ for their king, is already formed in this world from among the human race. But he says his kingdom is not of this world, *i. e.* it is not of the same nature with earthly kingdoms. As if our Lord had said, "My kingdom is no earthly kingdom, is not governed in a political manner according to human laws and institutions; nor is it defended by carnal weapons or temporal arms, or conducted with external pomp and ceremony; and consequently the Roman emperor has nothing to fear from it. I shall not in the least alienate his subjects from their allegiance to him, nor encroach on his temporal rights."

It is true, the kingdoms of this world are under the control of the son of God, who, together with his Father, so appoints, disposes, and orders their power and limits, as best contributes to the chastisement of his people, or the protection of his church. Therefore, in his character of the eternal wisdom, he says, 'By me kings reign, and princes decree justice,' (Prov. viii. 15, 16.) They all hold their dominions as fiefs from the King of kings and Lord of lords, and must acknowledge, 'that the most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men, and giveth them to whomsoever he will,' (Dan. iv. 17.) But the proper kingdom of Jesus Christ, which he here emphatically calls 'My kingdom,' [*i. e.* the kingdom, which he governs as mediator between God and man and whose subjects he purchased with his blood] is no worldly kingdom, but a heavenly kingdom, or the kingdom of heaven, as it is frequently termed in the gospel.

This kingdom of the Messiah, is in several respects, directly opposite to the kingdoms of this world. No unrighteousness has place there. No tears of the oppressed are seen, nor the groans of

suffering innocence are heard, in that kingdom. It is founded on truth and righteousness, and is governed with mildness, love, and equity. In this kingdom 'the king's strength also loveth judgment,' (Psalm xcix. 4.) In several other particulars also it is infinitely exhalted above all the kingdoms of this world, as will appear by the following particulars.

1. Temporal kingdoms derive their origin from mortal men; but the kingdom of Christ has the immortal God for its founder, who by an eternal decree hath appointed it unto the mediator of the new covenant, (Luke xxii. 29.)

2. The laws by which worldly kingdoms are governed are instituted by men, and the observance of those laws are enforced by pains and penalties; but the laws of the kingdom of Christ derive their sanction from heaven, where they were made, and are written in the hearts of his subjects by the spirit of love.

3. The kingdoms of this world affect external pomp and splendor, in order to dazzle the eye, and command respect; but the kingdom of Christ is the kingdom of the cross, and its ornaments consist in the holiness of its subjects, (Psalm xciii. 5.)

4. The power of temporal kingdoms extends only to the bodies, lives, and possessions of the subjects; but the kingdom of Christ extends its authority over the souls and consciences of men.

5. The subjects of the kingdoms of this world consist of a mixture of good and bad; but the proper subjects of Jesus Christ are born of God, and are kings and priests to God, his heavenly Father.

6. Temporal kingdoms are protected by worldly arms; but the weapons employed in the kingdom of Christ are spiritual, (2 Cor. x. 3, 4.)

7. The kingdoms of this world stand in need of strong towns and fortresses for their security; but it is not so in the kingdom of Christ, for 'the Lord is a wall of fire round about his people,' (Zech. ii. 5.) Therefore may his subjects sing, 'We have a strong

city ; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks,' (Isa. xxvi. 1.)

8. The greatest happiness in earthly kingdoms consists in outward peace, and affluence of worldly goods. The kingdom of Christ is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, (Rom. xiv. 17.)

9. The kingdoms of this world have their bounds and limits, and are confined to particular nations : But of the kingdom of Christ it is written, ' All kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him,' (Psalm lxxii. 11.)

10. To earthly kingdoms an appointed time is set, how long they shall subsist ; but of the kingdom of the Messiah it is said, ' of his kingdom there shall be no end,' (Luke i. 33.) From these particulars we may form a clearer conception of the meaning of those words, ' My kingdom is not of this world.'

Thirdly, Our blessed Lord gives a reason why his kingdom is not of this world. Here, indeed, he might have appealed to the predictions of the prophets, in which the kingdom of the Messiah is generally represented as a spiritual kingdom, (Psa. lxxii. Jer. xxiii. Zech. ix.) He might have made a fuller representation of it, and have compared the nature of his kingdom with that of earthly kingdoms. But this, Pilate would have neither had patience to hear, nor capacity to understand. Therefore Christ in his consummate wisdom offers to him such proofs as were adapted to his reason, and which, as a statesman, he could not but understand : For he draws this plain conclusion, ' If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews.' As if our blessed Lord had said, " The kings of this world have their officers, life-guards, soldiers, garrisons, and armies, for the protection of their persons and subjects. Therefore if I had any design to be a worldly king of the Jews, I should, like other kings, have provided officers, sol-

diers, and life-guards, to defend my person against insults and violence. Nay, these my dependants instead of sleeping last night in the garden, when the Jews apprehended me, would have fought, and made a vigorous resistance; so that I had not been carried off by mine enemies, without great blood-shed on both sides. This had been the case if I were an earthly king. But as no such scheme ever entered into my thoughts, those few disciples that I have are quite unfit for the execution of such enterprising projects: and as I myself enjoined them to make no resistance, from this single circumstance may easily conclude, that I am very far from being an earthly monarch, and that the emperor has nothing at all to apprehend from me." Thus Christ in the first part of his confession invalidates the false opinion, which might be entertained of his kingdom. Hence we may learn the following truths.

1. By our Saviour's humility and self-denial, our excessive pride and ambition were to be expiated.

The son of God is here, indeed, seen in the lowest state of humiliation and abasement. He not only descends from the throne of heaven into bonds and misery; but here he publicly renounces the thrones of the earth, to which he had the most rightful claim: For who is more worthy to wear an earthly crown, than he who distributes them to men? But he despises the splendor of golden crowns, and the blaze of gems, and permits a crown of thorns to surround his sacred temples. Of such an astonishing humiliation, the cause must have been very momentous. Man, in the state of innocence, was the king and sovereign of all earthly creatures, the visible vicegerent of the invisible God; but not satisfied with this honour and dignity, he aimed at something higher; he wished to have no superior, and to reign without control. Hence he withdraws his allegiance from his lawful sovereign, and refuses to obey the laws and ordinan-

ses of his Creator. This aspiring temper, and rebellious inclination, have been unhappily transmitted down by the first parents of mankind to all their descendants. Our hearts are naturally, refractory and disobedient. We are all by nature savage and untractable; and though we are plunged into a miserable state, our pride is equal to our misery. We have an earthly disposition, disorderly appetites, and an eager inclination for every thing which makes a show, and glitters in the world; and we are passionately fond of being honoured and respected by others, and cannot bear the least humiliation or contempt. This arrogant haughtiness, which shews itself more in some men than in others, could be expiated only by the deep humiliation and abasement of him, who is the prince of the sovereigns of the earth. Satan would for ever had decoyed us by worldly pomp and show, had not the son of God by his low abasement disengaged us from it. Let us admire his stupendous love, and shew our gratitude to our blessed Redeemer by a willing renunciation of the pomps and vanities of this world. Let us thankfully make use of this freedom, which was purchased for us at so dear a rate.

2. It is an unspeakable comfort to faithful and humble Christians, that the kingdom of Christ is not of this world. If the kingdom of Christ were an earthly kingdom, how hard would be the fate of the poor and wretched? If Christ was an earthly monarch, how difficult would they find it to be admitted into his presence, with their humble petitions? and how often would they be insultingly repulsed by the officers of his court? But now, as he is a spiritual King, no such difficulties are to be apprehended in approaching him. For it is written of him, 'He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and save the souls of the indigent. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence,' (Psalm

lxxii. 12, 13, 14.) This amiable description of our King should endear him to our souls, and induce all timorous consciences to place a firm trust in him, and to comfort themselves with the thoughts of being under his Almighty protection.

3. As our king is not of this world, so must we likewise, if we will be his true subjects, separate and distinguish ourselves from the men of this world, by a benevolent temper and heavenly conversation.

This is the natural consequence of this confession of Jesus Christ. Here that common observation must take place, "As the king is, so are the subjects." Our blessed Lord himself saith of his disciples, 'They are not of the world, as I am not of the world,' (John xvii. 16.) May this important truth sink deep into our hearts! we own him to be our king who was the completest pattern of humility and self-abasement; who not only descended from the throne of God to poverty and bonds, but also publicly renounced the thrones and kingdoms of this world; who fled from the people when they were for making him king by force; and lastly, who willingly suffered himself to be apprehended, bound, insulted, and reviled. If we would be the true and faithful subjects of such a lowly king, we must also put on the same meek and lowly disposition; we must rather shun than pursue the honours of this world, banish all pride and ambition from our breasts, and be clothed with humility. Moreover, we profess ourselves the subjects of a king, who was so poor, that he had not where to lay his head; who was so far from making it his business to amass wealth, and to heap up treasures on earth, that he divested himself of his own divine riches, for our welfare. We must likewise, after his example, despise rather than amass perishable riches, and lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven. If God is pleased to send us riches, instead of setting our *hearts upon* them by an inordinate love, we must

make to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, by distributing to the poor, and think it more blessed to give than to receive. Lastly, we serve a king, whose whole life was full of hardships and troubles; who, for our sake, deprived himself of all his heavenly enjoyments; who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for our souls. Thus must we also be declared enemies of voluptuousness and sensuality; nay, we must use lawful pleasures and worldly conveniencies with true self-denial, and, according to the great example set by our spiritual sovereign, exercise ourselves in temperance, chastity, and purity of heart. Thus from the very nature of the kingdom of Christ, arise the strongest motives for denying all inordinate love of honours, riches, and pleasures; motives of infinitely greater weight, than any which reason or philosophy can suggest.

But, let us here enter on a serious examination of ourselves, and ask our own hearts, Whether we are such subjects, whose temper and conversation bear a resemblance to those of our Spiritual King, Jesus Christ? We shall greatly deceive ourselves, if we suppose that all those who call themselves Christians are true subjects of Christ. The man of a haughty and proud spirit; he that looks on restless ambition as the characteristic of a great and noble mind; he that is covetous, or given up to sensuality and voluptuousness, is no citizen of that heavenly kingdom, which is not of this world. On the contrary, while he suffers such dispositions to exercise dominion over him, he is a slave of satan, the God of this world, who has established his tyrannizing throne on these vicious inclinations of the human mind. Let every one therefore, who still finds himself in such a miserable state, lift up his hands to the king of kings and pray to him, that he would renew a right spirit or temper of mind within him, and make him truly subject to his sceptre of righteousness. This wonderful humility

and abasement of the blessed Jesus is a powerful motive for us to humble ourselves, and renounce the high things of the world. Does our Lord and King publicly disclaim the pomp of the world, what have we therefore to do with it? If we would put our trust, and glory in him, we must divest ourselves of all unbecoming pride and arrogance; we must wean ourselves from an over-fondness for earthly things, and bring down our ambitious and aspiring thoughts to the obedience of Christ. And how willingly should we do this, were our hearts inflamed with that love, which humbled him so low!

4. The faithful servants and soldiers of Jesus Christ must fight valiantly for their king, and the honour of his kingdom.

Our blessed Saviour, by saying, 'If my kingdom were of this world then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered up to the Jews,' gives us likewise to understand, that it is the indispensible duty of the servants and subjects of earthly sovereigns to fight for their king, when he is threatened with any danger. Hence the inference is very natural, that if we would be real servants and subjects of Jesus Christ, our spiritual king, we must also exert ourselves, and fight for him in a manner conformable to the spiritual nature of his kingdom; not with carnal weapons, but with the weapons of God, (2 Cor. x. 4, 5.) which are mighty to the casting down of every high thing, that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and the obedience of Christ. This is, indeed, in a more particular manner, the duty of the ministers of the gospel, who, when truth is oppressed, are not to be indifferent, or from a love of outward ease and security, to withdraw themselves from the field of combat for the purity of the doctrines of Christ. On the contrary, they must contend for the truth, and, as St. Paul exhorts Timothy, 'Endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ,' (2 Tim. ii. 3.) *For in this* combat, in behalf of the truth of the

gospel, sufferings must be expected; and we ought to be ready to give up honour and character to the tongues of slanderers, and the virulent pens of malicious libellers, unless we will basely betray the truth. Therefore, the ministers of the gospel, when the cause of Christ and his kingdom is in danger, must fight for it with prayers, with their tongues, and with their pens, when called upon by divine providence; and in this spiritual warfare, they must be determined to sacrifice their character, their ease, their substance and even life itself. Nevertheless, it is also the duty of every private real christian, when the kingdom of Christ is in danger, to take up the armour of prayer, and make use of the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God. By these distinguishing marks, every one may prove himself, whether he be a faithful servant of Jesus Christ? Whether he has resolution and spirit to risk every thing for his honour? Or whether, when the honour of his sovereign is injured, and the course of his divine truths obstructed, he will stand as an unconcerned spectator?

II. Our blessed Saviour, in the second part of his confession, explains the true nature of his kingdom, and shews that he is a spiritual king. Herein we shall observe the three following particulars.

First, The occasion of this part of our Lord's confession; which was given by Pilates second question, namely, art thou a king then? the governor probably surmised at first, that the Jews accused Christ of setting up for a king, out of mere hatred and malice. But now he hears Jesus himself thrice make mention of his kingdom. This perplexes Pilate, and he concludes that if Christ has a kingdom, he must be a king; and as he knew of no other kingdom but those of this world, he must have thought it strange, that there should be kingdoms which were not of the world. He therefore again comes up to the Lord Jesus, and, in order to draw the truth out of him, *proposes a new question to him.*

Secondly, We may observe the confession, which Jesus made in these words, 'Thou sayest that I am a king.' As if our blessed Lord had said, royalty is what I must not allow to be denyed to me; but neither yourself nor the Jews have a right idea of it. However truth is truth; and I should be found a liar, if I was to deny that regal dignity, which my Father has conferred on me. Thus, as our blessed Saviour had acknowledged himself to be the Son of God, in plain and explicit terms, before the spiritual court of the Jews so does he here, before the civil tribunal of pilate,' with the same clearness and perspicuity declare himself to be the king of Israel. Had the life of our blessed Saviour been dearer to him than the truth of God's honour, he might easily have been released from his bonds by an ambiguous evasive answer, and might have said, I am no king, *i. e.* I am not a king in your sense of the word. But the blessed Jesus scorns to make use of any subterfuge, and instead of giving any sanction to equivocations and mental evasions by his great example, he shews by his behaviour on this occasion that truth is boldly to be acknowledged before kings and rulers, from the heart. But our blessed Lord does not stop at a bare confession; for he farther adds,

Thirdly, An explanation of it; in which,

1. He sets forth the true nature of his kingly office.

2. He lays before Pilate the distinguishing character of the subjects of his kingdom.

1. The true nature of his kingly office is explained by Christ in these words: 'To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.' By this our blessed Saviour gives us to understand, that his dominion, as our mediator, is not confined to the external goods and earthly possessions of men but extends itself to the conscience; and that the design of his government is to free his subjects from those fallacious

and lying customs, in which they were entangled by the fall, from all the deceitful and wicked ways of satan and to bring them to the acknowledgment of the truth. By truth, Jesus here means the truths contained in the gospel. It was not our blessed Saviour's concern to propose philosophical, mathematical, or political truths. The truth, to the knowledge of which he was to bring mankind, was of a much sublimer nature. It was a truth unknown to human reason; a truth which his heavenly Father had declared by Moses and the prophets in types and figures, by promises and predictions. The substance of this great truth, is, that as no man can be justified, and consequently entitled to eternal happiness, by the works of the law, God, out of his infinite love to mankind, has given his son as the Saviour and reconciler of the world, to the end that all who acknowledge their inability, believe on the name of the great mediator, and give themselves up to be renewed by the spirit in the image of God, may not perish, but have everlasting life.

This doctrine of the gospel is emphatically stiled the truth, not only as it derives its origin from God, who is truth itself, but likewise as it is a well-grounded, infallible truth, and worthy of all acceptation.

Of this great truth, the blessed Jesus was to bear witness both in his words and actions; and therefore he is called 'the faithful witness,' (Rev. i. v.)—And the Father has declared, saying 'Behold I have given him for a witness to the people.' (Isaiah iv. 4.) He has likewise all the qualifications, which can be justly required in a witness. If it be necessary, that a witness should have heard or seen the things which he testifies, in order to have a certain knowledge of them; the son of God was himself present at the eternal reconciliatory council of the Father, in which it was graciously determined, that the world should be redeemed by the son. Jesus had voluntarily promised to take on himself the work of redemption, and his Almighty Father in return had

promised him, that he would anoint and establish him in the human nature he was to assume, as a king over the human race. Therefore, he might justly say, 'We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen,' (John iii. 11.) Hence also, John the Baptist says of him, 'He that cometh from above is above all; and what he hath seen and heard that he testifieth,' (John iii. 31, 32.)

Moreover, our blessed Lord subjoins with a peculiar energy that for this end he was born, and that he came into the world, as the great ambassador of God to bear witness unto the truth. These words presuppose his prior existence, and that he was in possession of his regal dignity before he became visible in in the world. Hence he intimates, that he came into the world with no other view than to convince mankind of these great truths, that he is the only sacrifice for the sins of the world; that whoever will be saved must believe on his name; and by such testimony, to free mankind from the dominion and tyranny of the spirit of lies and error, to enlighten them with the light of truth, and to fit them for the service of God, that they might worship him in spirit and in truth. These are the royal transactions of Jesus Christ; which it must be owned, bear but little resemblance to the political transactions and warlike exploits of earthly kings whose business is to enact salutary laws for the support of their kingdom and the external welfare of their subjects, and to enforce obedience to them, by punishing the refractory and disobedient. Our blessed saviour likewise, in these words, describes,

2. The distinguishing character of his subjects: 'Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.'

These words exhibit to us both the characteristic and duty of the subjects of Christ.

Their characteristic is this, 'they are of the truth.' As 'to be of God, (John viii 47) signifies the same thing 'as to be born of God,' (1 John ii. 29.) so 'to

be of the truth,' is of the same import as 'to be born of the truth, (James i. 18.) or to be begotten of God, [the self-existent truth] with the word of truth,' (James i. 18.) That is, in other words to receive the testimony which God has given of his son, and which the Son himself has given of the truth, so far as to be enlightened, converted, and from the heart to hate all deceitful ways; and to obey and bear an affectionate love to the truth; as if it was the parent that begot us.

The duty of the subjects of Christ is this, namely, that they hear his voice: 'Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice, *i. e.* acknowledges me for his sovereign and instructor, and obeys my precepts and injunctions from the heart. When I say, 'repent and believe the gospel!' he hears this voice not only with his ears, but likewise attends to it with an obedient heart. When I say, 'Whoever will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me!' he does as I enjoin him. When I say, 'love your enemies; do good to them that hate you!' he treats his enemies with kindness, gentleness, and humanity. Lastly, since I say, 'render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's!' he omits no opportunity of complying with this my command. From all this Pilate might have been convinced, that the doctrines of Christ instead of encouraging rebellion made the best of subjects, that the Jews were his enemies for no other reason, but for telling them the truth, which their mutinous and haughty spirit could by no means bear.

This was, indeed, such discourse, as had never before been heard in Pilate's hall of judgment. By this testimony of the truth, Christ further intended, not only to remove Pilate's unnecessary apprehensions that he instigated the emperor's subjects to a revolt; but likewise indirectly to make an impression on his heart to insinuate an awakening, but whole-

some, sting into his conscience, and to inspire him with the love of truth. Notwithstanding all this, we shall see in the sequel, that Pilate soon made light of this kind admonition, and precluded his heart against this testimony of the truth. Let us therefore take care, that this discourse of the blessed Jesus may bring forth more fruit in our hearts; and to this end we shall make the following observations on this subject.

1. Our blessed Saviour, by owning his dignity, has publicly owned us for his subjects and established his kingdom over all.

We must approve ourselves his subjects, by overcoming the world and its evil customs, as he overcame the world; and by overcoming the lust of the flesh, to which the most powerful monarchs are often slaves.

If Christ our king declared, that he was born and came into the world to bear witness unto truth; so should we likewise be thoroughly persuaded, that the end of our being born again is, that we may love the truth, and bear witness to it in our words and actions.

2. As the kingdom of Jesus Christ is a kingdom of truth, no one is to be admitted into it, who loveth or maketh a lie.

Satan is in scripture called the father of lies, (John viii. 44.) and the account given of his subjects by St. John, (Rev. 22, 15.) is, that they love and take a pleasure in forging lies. In satan's kingdom there is nothing but falsity and dissimulation, delusive appearances, and vain deceptions. He infatuates men by giving them false ideas of God, whom they falsely imagine to be like themselves. Hence God says to the wicked man, 'Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself,' (Psa. l. 21.) As thou makest it thy supreme felicity to live in mirth and festivity, and to enjoy the sinful pleasures of the world, thou vainly thinkest that this is what I shall easily connive at, and that I am not at all displeased with a man who gives himself up to sensuality and voluptuousness. Satan infatuates men with false

ideas of repentance: Hence they imagine it consists only in saying with the mouth, that they are miserable sinners; that they are sorry for their misdoings; and that they will amend their lives; while the heart, in the mean time, is not touched, nor is there any change likely to be wrought in it. He infatuates men with false ideas of faith: Hence they vainly imagine, that if they do but stedfastly and earnestly rely on the merits of Christ, that faith infallibly will save them; whereas they continue under the dominion of sin, and never shew forth this ideal presumptuous faith of theirs by works of love, and habits of virtue. He infatuates men with most false ideas of eternal felicity; for carnal men are apt to form to themselves base and groveling ideas of the joys of eternal life, and think that in heaven they shall have such enjoyments as are unworthy of that glorious place, the abode of purity and holiness. Such is the power of the lying spirit of darkness over the understanding of those, whom he hath fatally blinded. But no less is his fascinating influence over the perverse wills of those, whom he has, as it were, bound and fettered with the bonds of falsehood, hypocrisy, and dissimulation, so that nothing less than the infinite power of God can break them asunder. But all these chains fall off, when a man is, as it were, born of God, and transplanted into the kingdom of Jesus Christ, which is the kingdom of truth. Then he learns to look on the things which belong to the spirit of God in a different light from what he did before. Then he is sensible what a childish, absurd, and unworthy idea he had entertained of God, of repentance, of faith, and eternal felicity; for his understanding being now irradiated by the light of the Holy spirit, he acquires a more perfect knowledge of these things. Now, the light of truth rises in his understanding; by the lustre of which error, prejudice, and false conceptions of spiritual things, are dissipated like mists before the sun. The true image which is in

Christ Jesus will now be formed in his will; and the spirit of God is now by its sacred influence restoring in his soul the divine resemblance, which consists in wisdom, righteousness, and truth. He now conceives an utter aversion for all falsehood, lies, and hypocrisy. He loveth and speaketh the truth from his heart; and is not ashamed to confess it, though attended with the greatest inconveniencies, insults, and affronts. Hence any one may easily infer, whether he belongs to the kingdom of the father of lies; or to the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and of the truth.

3. When we are called upon to confess the truth, we ought to avoid all evasions and subterfuges.

Among other reasons why St. Paul calls this confession, which Christ made before Pilate, a good confession, (1 Tim. vi. 18.) is, because he clearly and explicitly certified the true nature of his kingdom in these words, without any circumlocution, any vague or ambiguous expression. By this, the Son of God has left a noble example for all true professors, that they may when brought to be tried before the tribunal of Princes, make an unreserved confession of the truth. Therefore, when we are called upon by God to bear testimony to the truth, we must not deviate one step from it, or in the least prejudice the truth for fear of the cross, or any external sufferings. It is no less than eternal life that lies at stake, (1 Tim. vi. 12, 13.) He that cannot take up the cross of Christ will never be owned by him as his disciple, notwithstanding the sublimity of his speculations, or the fluency of his tongue. This spirit of integrity, by which the confessions of christians ought to be influenced, was very visible in the undaunted behaviour of Luther, who made a glorious profession in behalf of oppressed truth. For when he was asked, at the diet of worms, in the presence of the Emperor and the principal states of the empire, whether he would revoke what he had

hitherto taught and written? and that if he did not he should be proceeded against with the utmost severity; he made this intrepid answer: "Since your Imperial Majesty, and the illustrious Electors and princes who are here present require a plain, direct, and explicit answer to this question, I will give one at which no manner of offence can be taken; and it is this: Unless I am convinced of being in an error by testimonies drawn from the holy scriptures, or by clear and evident proofs, I neither can, nor will, revoke any thing I have said or written; it being neither safe nor advisable to act contrary to my conscience. By this declaration I abide; and God be my helper! Amen." Since therefore we profess the doctrine of Christ as reformed from the errors and superstition of Popery, let us pray to God that he will give us the spirit of confidence and faith; so that if we should be required to make a public confession of the truth, we may shew an undaunted resolution and ingenuous frankness, according to the example of Christ and his apostles, and the first reformers of christianity.

4. Barely to acknowledge the truth is not sufficient to render us true christians; but it must have a salutary effect on our lives and conversation.

Hence our blessed Saviour does not say, he that merely acknowledges the truth is my subject and disciple; but 'every one that is of the truth, *i. e.* to whom truth, candour, and probity are become, as it were, habitual, and influence all his thoughts, words, and actions, and heareth my voice, or obeys me as his Sovereign.' Let this be particularly observed by men of genius and learning, who make profession of the knowledge of truth. If their understanding only is busied amidst a croud of abstracted ideas, types, and representations, which even relate to the truths of religion, they do not yet properly belong to the kingdom of Jesus Christ. But when they act conformably to this truth, which derives its beginning from a knowledge of our natural blindness and

imbecility; then the truth shall make them free. 'Ye shall know the truth, saith Christ, and the truth shall make you free,' (John viii. 32.) free from self-love, pride, ambition, and haughtiness; free from the tyranny of carnal lusts, and all criminal desires. He that has not attained to this glorious freedom, notwithstanding all his penetration, and supposed merits in the service of truth, will not have his portion with the true subjects of Jesus Christ.

5. Our blessed Lord acknowledges none for his subjects, but those 'who hear his voice.'

Hence Jesus says in the close of his confession, 'Every one that is of the truth,' and is consequently my true disciple and subject, 'heareth my voice.' Now he that can say I hear the voice of Jesus Christ, may be apt to conclude, that he is therefore of the truth, and one of the true subjects of Christ. Such a one will perhaps say, "If this is all that is required in a true subject of Christ, I need not question but I am one of them; for I have heard the voice of Jesus Christ, as it sounds in the gospel, time after time, without number." Alas! vain man, it is not the question, whether the voice of Christ has outwardly reached the organs of hearing, and by the ears made its way to thy understanding. If that were sufficient to make thee a subject of Christ, the carnal Jews, who in the days of his incarnation heard his voice numberless times, would have been his true subjects; nevertheless, our blessed Saviour says unto them, 'Ye therefore hear not my words, because ye are not of God. Ye are of your father the devil, &c.' (John viii. 44, 47.) Upon this supposition, Pilate also would have been 'of the truth;' for he too heard our Saviour's voice, talking with him in the hall of Judgment. Nay, what is still more, if this sufficed, the devil himself may be said 'to be of the truth;' for he heard the voice of Christ when he tempted him in the wilderness, and likewise in those who were possessed; yet Christ witnesseth of him, 'that he

abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him, (John 44.)

Hence it appears, that something more is required to render a man a true subject of Christ, than to hear his voice or his word. For this end, there must be an inward and universal obedience of the heart, a serious attention and sincere obedience to all his commands, and a lively faith in all his promises, so as to place so great a value on the invisible rewards expected from them, and so to be firmly convinced of the certainty of them, as to be always ready to renounce and part with all temporal enjoyments for his sake.

Dost thou therefore boast, that thou hast heard the voice of Jesus Christ? tell me what happy effect it has on thy soul. Or thinkest thou that the voice of the Son of God, by which the heavens and the earth were made, is a dead and ineffectual sound, suffering men to stagnate in their carnal security? By no means; the voice of Christ is said to be like the 'sound of many waters,' (Rev. i. 15.) Has the sound of it therefore awakened thee from the sleep of security? The Psalmist says, (Psa. xxix. 5, 3, 9.) 'The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars; the voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire; the voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness; the voice of the Lord discovereth the forests.' Has that glorious voice shaken and fertilized thy barren heart? Has it broken the towering cedars of thy carnal imagination? Has it torn up the ill habits so deeply rooted in thee? These effects are not like the fleeting images of a dream, but leave a lasting and indelible impression on the heart during the whole course of a man's life. Look on others who have heard the voice of Christ, and see what a change it has wrought in them! Matthew, the publican, heard his voice, saying, 'Follow me!' and immediately he left all, and followed Christ; Simon and Andrew heard his voice; and they forsook all, and followed him. The young

man who died at Nain, heard his voice, raised himself up, and revived. Lazarus heard his voice, was spoke into life, and came forth from his grave. The man afflicted with the palsy heard his voice, and rose and took up the bed on which he before had been laid. Saul heard his voice; and of a persecutor and destroyer of his followers, became a champion for the truth of the gospel. See! what happy effects the voice of Jesus Christ had on these remarkable persons. Nay, it is said in St. John, (chap. v. 25.) 'The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.' And dost thou, O man, live the life that is of God? or art thou still dead in trespasses and sins, and pleadest thine inability and human weakness, when called upon to follow Christ, to crucify the flesh, and other duties that the gospel requires? Examine thyself well, how it fares with thy soul in this point! It is no inconsiderable fault for a man to stop his ears, and shut up his heart against the voice of Christ; for whoever will refuse to hear him, the same also he will not hear, nor answer when they call upon him in their distress, (Prov. i. 24, &c.) Alas! whither can we betake ourselves when we lie on the bed of death? What can we then implore but mercy! mercy! and who will then hear these our cries, but he whom the heavenly Father has enjoined us to hear: 'This is my beloved Son, him shall ye hear.' Therefore, if thou hast not in thy life obediently heard his voice, and conformed to it, What dependance canst thou have, that he will hear thy faint and broken accents at the approach of death? and how dreadful will be thy case if He, who alone has power to save and to condemn, should likewise turn his ears from thy cries! O let us hear his voice to-day, this instant; while we hear his voice, let us not harden our hearts. Let us turn our ears from the delusive voice of satan and the world, calling us to indulge in the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eye,

the pride of life, and other vices. It is enough that we have spent the past years of our life in such ill courses. Let us now with tears and prayers approach the blessed Jesus, acknowledging, confessing, and bewailing our former disobedience. Let us intreat him to give us an attentive ear, and an obedient heart. Let us sincerely believe in the rewards of his promising voice; let us obey the precepts of his commanding voice; so that one day it may be our happiness to hear his affectionate voice, saying, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom, prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'

THE PRAYER.

O FAITHFUL Saviour, whose merits are infinite, thanks be to thee for the good confession of thy kingdom, which thou madest before Pilate! Praised be thy name for the instructions thou hast given us, that we may rightly understand the nature of that kingdom! Thou seest, O Lord, what gross conceptions and carnal ideas we are apt to entertain of thy spiritual kingdom, be pleased therefore to inspire us with a salutary knowledge of thy kingly office, and to impart to us that heavenly temper and disposition which is the distinguishing badge of thy true subjects. Make us, we beseech thee, truly attentive to thy voice, and real lovers of thy truth; so that by walking in the truth, and abhorring all false ways, and all the delusions of satan, we may be more and more convinced that we are thy subjects, and that consequently we may be joint-heirs of thy glorious kingdom. And as we here suffer with thee, and combat for thy truth by the confession of thy religion, grant that we may also eternally reign with thee, and sit on thrones, as thou hast overcome, and art exalted to the throne of thy Father. Amen.

CONSIDERATION VII.

THE CONSEQUENCE OF OUR BLESSED SAVIOUR'S GOOD CONFESSION BEFORE PILATE.

'PILATE saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out unto the Jews, and saith unto the chief Priests and the people, I find no fault in this man. And the chief Priests were the more fierce. And when he was accused of the chief Priests and Elders, he answered nothing. Then saith Pilate unto him; answerest thou nothing? behold, hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee? Jesus answered him to never a word, insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly.' (Matth. xxvii. 12, 13, 14. Mark xv. 3, 4, 5. Luke xxiii. 4. John xviii. 38.)

In the last consideration, we have enlarged upon the good confession, which our Saviour made concerning his kingdom before the tribunal of Pilate; we shall now farther consider what followed that good confession.

First, with regard to Pilate,

Secondly, to our Saviour's accusers,

Thirdly, to the Lord Jesus himself.

I. With regard to the Roman governor, two things followed our Lord's confession, namely, 1. A question, 2. An acknowledgment of our blessed Saviour's innocence.

1. The question is this: What is truth? Jesus, in his confession, had several times mentioned the word truth, *viz.* 'To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one who is of the truth heareth my voice.' Upon this, Pilate starts the question, 'What is truth?' At first one would, from these words, be inclined to entertain a favourable opinion of Pilate, and to admire his willingness

to be instructed. We should be apt to think that the words of the blessed Jesus had kindled in him such a desire of knowing the truth, that he wished for nothing more passionately than to be thoroughly instructed by this divine Prophet, of whom he had already heard such a great character. But this good opinion, which might be conceived of Pilate from the sound of his words, is immediately effaced by his subsequent behaviour. For he had no sooner asked the question, than he turned his back on the Lord Jesus without staying for an answer, and went out to the Jews who were standing without the judgment-hall. Hence it is evident that he did not ask this question from any desire of information; it being probable that he thought it derogatory to his honour, to be taught by a contemptible Jew who stood bound before him as a prisoner; but that he asked it in an ironical manner, and with a mind filled with sceptical prejudices at least, if not with an aversion to, and contempt of, the truth.

If these words therefore be construed according to the temper from whence they proceeded, the meaning of the question will appear to be this: "Why dost thou talk of truth? Truth never made any man's fortune. It is no wonder, indeed, that the rulers of thy nation are so inveterate against thee, and are bent upon removing thee out of the way. I suppose thou hast told them the truth with too much freedom, and offended them by thy reproofs and public discourses. If it is thy sole business to tell the truth, thou wilt have but few adherents; so that the Emperor my master may be very easy about thy imaginary kingdom. Besides, if the whole quarrel between thee and the Jews be about the truth of religion, those affairs do not properly belong to my office; nor shall I throw away my time in the examination of these religious disputes: we Romans leave every one to teach and believe as he thinks fit, if he does but behave like a good citizen, and take care not to dis-

turb the tranquillity of the state." To this ironical question Pilate subjoined.

2. A confession of the innocence of the blessed Jesus. For when Pilate had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, who were gathered together in great numbers in the area before his judgment-hall, and called out openly, or perhaps proclaimed by a herald, in the hearing of the chief Priests and all the people, 'I find no fault in this man.' As if he had said, I have examined this man apart concerning the things of which you accuse him, and have carefully sifted the whole matter; but I find him guilty of no manner of crime. You say, We found him perverting the people; but for my part, I can find no shadow of truth in this accusation. He, indeed, owns that he is a King; but, at the same time, he declares that he makes it his sole business to bear witness to the truth. This confession, by the Roman law, is no capital crime. If that were the case, all the philosophers throughout the whole Roman empire would deserve to be crucified; since every one of them thinks he teaches nothing but the truth. If this person has too high a conceit of his doctrines, and thinks that he alone is so quick-sighted as to see clearly into truth, this is a failing common to other philosophers, and rather deserves pity than any punishment. At least, with regard to the faults you charge him with, I find him entirely innocent. This, probably, was the opinion of Pilate; and this declaration of our Saviour's innocence he caused to be publicly declared before all the people; which, in some measure, was a political stratagem. For as he knew that the rulers of the people had delivered Christ to him out of envy, which opinion is afterwards confirmed by St. Matthew, (chap. xxvii. 18.) he thought it best publicly to declare his innocence to the people, who perhaps were better inclined towards Jesus, and thereby to give them an opportunity of taking the innocent prisoner under their protection.

This is the first testimony, which Pilate gave of our Lord's innocence, and is of great importance: For,

First, This witness of our Saviour's innocence was a person in a public character, and bore the office of a judge.

Secondly, He was the Roman emperor's vicegerent, and consequently it was incumbent on him by his post, capitally to punish all rebellious and seditious persons.

Thirdly, He was quite impartial in this affair, and acted without being prejudiced either by hatred or love to Jesus.

Fourthly, He gave this remarkable testimony of his innocence, after having heard his cause, and strictly examined the prisoner.

Fifthly, He did it voluntarily and freely from his own conviction, and not at the request of any other person.

Lastly, By this declaration of Christ's innocence, he at the same time represented the sentence of death which the Sanhedrim had already past on him as an act of cruelty and injustice. From these circumstances which followed Christ's good confession we shall deduce the following truths.

1. The doctrine of the regal dignity of Christ has always been ridiculed by the world.

Pilate thought it the height of extravagance, that a mean person, who was bound as a common criminal, without money or soldiers to execute any thing of importance, should set himself up for a king; and still more extraordinary, that he should expect to become the sovereign and conqueror of the world, by bearing witness to the truth. This the heathen governor laughed at in his heart, and thus ridiculed this noble confession of Christ concerning his kingly dignity. The followers of Christ, in imitation of their Saviour, must willingly suffer themselves to be ridiculed and despised; being assured that though

they are not honoured by the world, yet that, after being ridiculed and reviled here, they shall at last reign with Christ, and sit on his throne.

2. The sincere love of truth is seldom found among the great, the rich, the wise and prudent of this world.

God has said, 'he requireth truth in the inward parts,' (Ps. li. 6.) and exhorts us to love the truth, (Zec. viii. 19.) but where shall one find the love of truth in the world? for 'truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter; the truth faileth, and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey,' (Isa. lix. 14, 15.) The love of truth is found more particularly wanting among the great and powerful of this world, who look upon truth and particularly the truths of religion, as something below their regard, and not worth enquiring after.

Thus the scene continues the same in our days, as it was before Pilate's judgment-seat. On one side stood the blessed Jesus in defence of the truth, which he maintained, and at last sealed with his blood; on the other side stood the Jews in opposition to the truth, which they hated and persecuted in the person and doctrine of Christ, and sought to oppress by lies and calumnies; and between these stood Pilate ridiculing both parties, and making a jest of both Jesus and the Jews. Thus in our days these three parties, with regard to the truth of religion, still exist. Some have a sense of the transcendent value of truth; they esteem it a precious gift of God, and as an invaluable jewel which he has committed to mankind; and accordingly they openly profess it, and are ready to sacrifice their lives and fortunes, and all that is dear and valuable, in defence of it. Others shew themselves declared enemies of the truth, and endeavour to suppress it, by changing it into error and falsehood, and hate and persecute the professors of it as obstinate heretics. Others again observe a culpable neutrality, ridicu-

ling both parties, and pretending that they are equally in the wrong, and give themselves too much trouble about truth. The controversies about truth appear to them as mere cavils about words; and if matters go well with them, if they enjoy riches, honours, and pleasures, it is the least of their care how it fares with truth.

Those who are regardless of truth, and look upon one religion as good as another, are for the most part, indeed, to be found among the rich and mighty of this world; who look upon it as the characteristic of prudence to swim with the stream, and to have no farther concern with truth than as it may promote their present interest. Hence it is not to be wondered at, that God should permit such errors to reign in the world, not only among the mean and illiterate, but also among persons of the greatest learning and abilities, who are looked on as lights of the world and pillars of the state. The cause of this is assigned by St. Paul in these words: 'They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved; for this cause God shall send on them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be condemned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.' (Thess. ii. 10, 11, 12.) It is no more than just and equitable, that they who make a jest of truth, should be deprived of its effulgent light, and cast into outer darkness; where, as a punishment, they must give credit to fictions and lying words, since they refuse to give God the honour due unto his name, and to acquiesce in the testimony of his sacred word. Hence also it happens, that the great, the wise, and powerful of this world drop off like unripe fruit, and desert to the camp of antichrist, not only in times of persecution for the sake of the gospel, or when any danger is to be apprehended; but also when they can promote their temporal advantage, or get a step higher in the world,

by such a desertion of the truth*. This scandalous indifference for the truth likewise prevails among the lower class of people, the generality of whom are more taking up in providing for the necessities of life, than in enquiring how they may obtain a true knowledge of the truth of the gospel. It is God's express will, 'that all men should come to the knowledge of the truth,' (1 Tim. ii. 4.) But these persons think, that to enquire after religious truths does not belong to them; and as for the learned, they may dispute to the day of judgment which religion is the best: But for their part they will keep to that in which they were born and educated, and in which their ancestors lived before them. Thus many Protestants continue to argue while they do not see any opportunity of bettering their condition, by embracing a false religion. But when such a temptation presents itself, they undervalue the truth and embrace error, without examining into the merits of both religions.

3. Candid laymen are generally sooner convinced of the innocence of the servants of God, than bigotted ecclesiastics, who are of a contrary opinion.

Pilate perceived that Jesus was innocent, when the chief Priests and Scribes, who were blinded by prejudice, and inflamed with passion, would not be convinced. This is still the case in the world. Statesmen and lay-magistrates are sooner convinced of the innocence of the witnesses of truth, than their ecclesiastical judges and adversaries, who, though they are in a spiritual office, are strangers to the spiritual life; nor are they taught of God. But alas! this conviction had no salutary effect on Pilate; for he proceeded no farther, but turns his back on the self-

* In this paragraph the author alludes to those who desert the Protestant cause in Germany, being allured by the Popish party, and gained over to their church, by promises of preferment, &c. of which there are too many instances. *W.*

existent truth, and asks, what is truth? And though he was conscious of Christ's innocence, yet he delivered him up to the barbarous cruelty of his enemies. Few, indeed, will expose themselves to any inconveniency for the sake of the persecuted members of Christ. When the men of this world are under any apprehensions, that by protecting their innocence they may subject themselves to suspicions and an evil report and make themselves enemies among the great, they do not choose to interpose in their defence. Woe to them, who for their own private interest molest and persecute the innocent! In order to atone for this depravity of mankind, Christ Jesus, the ever-glorious Son of God, permitted himself to be thus treated, to the inexpressible comfort of his members, when they come to suffer the like ill treatment for his sake.

II. We come, in the next place, to consider what followed our Saviour's confession, with regard to his accusers. By the confession which our blessed Lord made concerning his kingdom, &c. they were still more irritated; for they would by no means have it thought, that they had condemned an innocent man, and delivered him up to Pilate. St. Mark says, that the chief Priests accused him of many things. They not only repeated their former charge; but enlarged and aggravated the accusation, by many new and fictitious articles. They concluded, that the greater number of crimes they laid to his charge, the more probability there was of overwhelming our Saviour's innocence; that if one complaint should not incense Pilate against him, perhaps another might prove more effectual; and lastly, that if one single charge by itself should not have the desired effect, yet all the articles taken together might turn the scale against the innocent Jesus.

This was the contrivance of the chief Priests, and likewise, as St. Matthew adds, of the Elders of the people; and consequently of all the heads of the

Jewish church, whom it mostly concerned to support and defend their carnal authority, which had been weakened by the spiritual doctrines of Christ. The best way to compass their ends they imagined would be by removing Jesus out of the way, that he might no longer oppose their hypocrisy, by his preaching. But as Pilate had witnessed, and probably caused it to be proclaimed by a herald, that he found no guilt in the man, they were the more provoked; so that Pilate's declaration of our blessed Saviour's innocence, like oil poured on the fire, the more inflamed their minds, and caused louder exclamations against Jesus. Hence we learn the following truths:

1. It is the usual stratagem of the world to accumulate false accusations against the witnesses of the truth.

It is said, 'They accused Jesus of many things.' This is a wicked device which the enemies of truth, both in the Pagan and Popish persecutions, have constantly practised. What a hideous groupe of calumnies did the Pope's adherent's vent against Luther! so that one cannot but wonder where the lying Spirit could collect all its materials for such absurd accusations, as they invented to asperse this glorious instrument of God?

2. As we have heaped sin upon sin, so in our Saviour's sufferings, one accusation upon another was brought against him.

What innumerable sins have been the consequence of the first fall! Hence St. Paul says, 'By one man's disobedience many are made sinners,' (Rom. v. 19.) How has the venom, which lurked in the disobedience of our first parents, spread itself into numberless channels, and infected their unhappy descendants! How many millions of dreadful sins have sprung from that corrupt fountain! And we still daily see men adding sin to sin, 'till the measure is full, so as at last to run over. The Son of God suffered one accusation upon another to be heaped on him, in order

to cover the multitude of our sins. But this is a comfort which can be properly valued only by an awakened conscience; to which satan lays open such a large and dreadful catalogue of sins, that the sinner is astonished at the multitude of his transgressions, and cries out, 'My sins are more in number than the hairs of my head, or the sand on the sea-shore,' (Psalm xl. 13.) When the sinner stands thus aghast, and terrified at the number and heinousness of his sins, then he finds comfort in the multitude of accusations heaped on his innocent Redeemer. He may be well assured, that his heavenly Father will forgive his numberless sins; and that he shall be safe under the defence and protection of his Saviour's innocence, whatever accusations satan may bring against him.

3. The authority of a high post or dignity is often abused, in order to gain credit to false accusations.

The accusations brought against the blessed Jesus were mere calumnies and falsities; but as they were preferred by the chief Priests and elders of the people they imagined that their high stations would induce Pilate the sooner to give credit to their false charge. This is still the way in the persecutions of true Christians. When the enemies of the truth have on their side persons of great note and learning, who join with them and defend their proceedings, they think that whatever comes from them must be received as divine oracles; and that what is wanting in proof of the accusations must be made up by the authority of the learned or dignified accuser. Our blessed Lord in his sufferings experienced many disadvantages from the dignity of his enemies, which made an unhappy impression even on the minds of his own disciples. For after his resurrection, they seem to distrust his promises, saying, 'the chief Priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him; but we trusted that it had been he, who should have redeemed Israel,' (Luke xxiv. 20.)

Thus their weak minds were not a little offended at the high rank and reputation of those, who had promoted their master's death. This has been often the case with the faithful members of Jesus Christ. At the council of Constance, (which was held about a hundred years before the reformation begun by Luther) where John Huss was unjustly condemned to be burnt as a heretic, his Imperial Majesty, several Embassadors, three Electors, a great number of Princes, three Patriarchs, twenty-eight Cardinals, and a hundred and fifty-five Bishops, besides Divines and Civilians from all parts of Europe, were present; and yet by such an august assembly of great personages was truth condemned, and innocence oppressed. Who will therefore take offence at such things, or be awed and deterred from the confession of truth? The way has been long since smoothed for us, to get over this rock of offence by Christ himself and his blessed martyrs.

Lastly, we are to enquire what followed after our Saviour's good confession, with regard to Christ himself. The blessed Jesus was silent on this occasion, to the astonishment of all who were present. Hence we may observe,

First, That mention is made of it in Pilate's words to Jesus; for he wonders at his silence, and in his surprise, asks him this question: 'Answerest thou nothing?' As if he had said, art thou quite insensible to thy own reputation and safety, since thy life and character are at stake? And dost thou not hear thyself accused of crimes, which the law punishes with death? How canst thou be silent at such a crisis, and suffer thy enemies to accuse thee without making any defence, or opposition to the charge they bring against thee? St. Matthew and St. Mark observe, that Pilate farther added, 'Hearest thou not, how many things they witness against thee?' Hence it may, with some probability, be inferred, that the chief Priests and Elders brought witnesses with

them before Pilate, to back the indictment with their testimony. Notwithstanding all this, our blessed Lord continued silent. It seems as if Pilate had some compassion on Jesus, and imagined that his silence might proceed from fear and despondency, so that he would not presume to speak in his own defence; and therefore these words may be looked upon as a permission and encouragement to Jesus to speak his mind, and to vindicate himself in the best manner he could.

Secondly, We have here likewise an account of our blessed Lord's behaviour after these words of Pilate. The Evangelist informs us, that 'Jesus answered him to never a word.' For neither the high rank of his accusers, nor the heinousness of the accusation, nor yet Pilate's encouraging question, could induce the blessed Jesus to break his silence. He stood firm and immoveable as a rock, amidst the outrageous fury of the Jews and Gentiles, and the tumultuous waves of their clamorous accusations. Now this silence was founded both on propriety, and justice. For,

1. He had before made an ample confession of the truth: But Pilate had ridiculed the declaration he had made, and consequently rendered himself unworthy of any farther information; for he, that is not faithful in the grace he has received, will have no more intrusted to him.

2. He knew that the judge himself was perfectly convinced of his innocence.

3. The charge which the Jews alleged against him consisted of things, that were either manifestly false, or of such a nature, that they did properly fall under the cognizance of Pilate.

4. Christ was not willing, by his reply, to give the Jews any further occasion of sinning by additional lies, and repeated accusations.

5. He was desirous to shew, that he was from his heart willing to die for us, by suffering the sen-

tence of death to be executed on him, without offering any plea in arrest of judgment.

6. Lastly, He was determined to fulfil the prophecies which had before declared, that 'as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he would not open his mouth,' (Isaiah liii. 7. compare Psa. xxxviii. 14, 15.)

Thirdly, We have here an account of the effect which our Saviour's silence had on Pilate. Concerning this circumstance, we are told, that 'the governor marvelled greatly.' It must have appeared something strange to Pilate, that a criminal, who was brought before his judgment-seat, should be silent at such a juncture. For those who have the worst cause are generally most importunate, and loud in justifying themselves before a court of judicature. Pilate therefore wondered at this man's extreme timidity, or rather magnanimity, since he seemed to despise all the terrible accusations brought against him, and shewed by his silence that he was ready to suffer death. To conclude the subject, we shall here make the following observations:

1. Though God frequently permits impious men and hypocrites to be disappointed in their wicked designs; yet they seldom desist from their evil purposes, and leave their wicked ways.

The chief Priests and Scribes had already been disappointed by their false witnesses, when they examined Jesus before their council; one evidence contradicted another, and their depositions were so incoherent, that they afforded no sufficient proof to condemn Jesus as guilty of the charge. Nevertheless, though the Divine Providence had baffled this wicked attempt, yet they persevere in it, and come to Pilate, attended by other false witnesses; and therefore as truth did not avail them, they had recourse to lies and falsehood. This depravity is still too common among men. How often does God permit sinners to be disappointed; so that their sins bring ridicule and disgrace upon them, or ruins their sub-

stance and health? How often does a drunkard in his ebriety commit such things as expose him to contempt and disgrace, or by his intemperance contract some severe distemper? Yet on the first invitation of his debauched companions, as soon as the long-suffering of God has permitted him to recover his strength, he returns to that same vice which had occasioned his illness. How often is a person who is entangled in the snares of impurity detected, and his leud practices come to light? How often is the thief surprised in the very fact, and in consequence of it, publicly undergo some ignominious punishment, yet both the one and the other still go on in their wickedness; only for the future they use more caution, that they may not be surprised. Thus did this depravity of the human heart make a part of our Saviour's sufferings; and we may observe it in his enemies and accusers, as in a mirror of injustice and obduracy.

2. Christ by his silence before Pilate appeared in the form of a sinner, and atoned for 'our clamorous importunities, and false justifications, in our own defence.'

When a sinner is awakened by his conscience, and his secret sins are placed before his eyes, he no longer pretends to excuse and justify himself; but lays his hand on his mouth, and owns himself guilty. Now Christ having permitted the sins of the whole world to be imputed to him at the Divine tribunal, by his silence on this occasion before a human tribunal, put on the appearance of a convicted sinner, who, under the condemnation of his conscience, dares not open his mouth. And as our petulant tongues are so ready, and our voices so loud in palliating our sins, and justifying our iniquitous proceedings, when perhaps, our heart at the same time is convinced that we are guilty, our blessed Saviour was silent for the expiation of this depravity of human nature. Let us therefore thankfully acknowledge, that our Redeemer

was pleased to be silent in our stead, and praise him for this instance of his love. Let us, out of reverence to his silence before Pilate, henceforth cease to justify our faults, and excuse our misdoings. Let us say with holy Job, 'I have uttered that I understood not, therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes,' (chap. xliii. 3, 6.) Oh, that we may thus judge ourselves! and then we shall not be judged, and condemned of the Lord.

THE PRAYER.

We praise thee, O faithful and ever-living Saviour, for all the several species of sufferings which thou didst patiently endure, in order to procure for us the forgiveness of our manifold sins and impieties before the Divine tribunal. Bless, O Lord, to our souls the consideration of this part of thy sufferings. May every insult, every indignity and unjust treatment, to which thou hast submitted in our stead, be for our eternal advantage! When we acknowledge our guilt, and confess our sins, clothe us with the spotless robe of thy innocence. When the consciousness of our numberless misdeeds alarm and terrify us, so as to render us incapable of pleading for ourselves, do thou speak for us, as our Patron and Intercessor. Make us sensible that thou art the only refuge of terrified consciences; so that flying to thee we may find life, safety, and rest, and be acquitted from all accusations brought against us at the tribunal of thy heavenly Father. Grant this for the sake of thy name. Amen.

CONSIDERATION VIII.

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST BEFORE HEROD.

'And the chief Priests were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout

all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place. When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked, whether the man were a Galilean? And as soon as he knew that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself was also at Jerusalem at that time. And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him. Then he questioned with him in many words; but Jesus answered him nothing. And the chief Priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him. And Herod and his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him; and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together; for before they were at enmity between themselves.' (Luke xxiii. 5—12.)

These words exhibit to us the sufferings of the Lord Jesus before King Herod: And here we may observe,

First, The occasion of this part of our blessed Saviour's sufferings.

Secondly, The indignities he suffered before Herod.

I. This part of Christ's sufferings was occasioned partly by our blessed Lord's accusers, and partly by Pilate.

The accusers of Christ gave occasion to it, by mentioning the province of Galilee in their accusation of our blessed Saviour. When the chief Priests observed that Pilate fluctuated in his opinion, and not only seemed to be convinced of our Lord's innocence, but had made a public declaration of it, they were so exasperated that they assailed the blessed Jesus with a violent tempest of fresh accusations. But when our blessed Lord, to Pilate's great astonishment, would not make any answer, they grew the more clamorous and importunate, and represented

the prudent silence of the Lamb of God as proceeding from a consciousness, that he had nothing to say in answer to the charge brought against him, or to urge by way of excuse or justification. Accordingly, 'they were the more fierce;' (verse 5.) and arming themselves with fresh effrontery, they began to urge Pilate with new calumnies and slanders. To these, however the dignity of their rank and sanctity of their office gave the necessary weight and importance; and as they were destitute of legal proofs, they endeavoured to prevail on him to put Jesus to death by tumultuous clamours and repeated vociferations.

As the Jews had nothing new to urge that had any appearance of truth, so as to induce Pilate to comply with their desires, they repeated their former charge of rebellion, but they clothed it in other words, with the addition of a new circumstance which could not fail of having some weight with Pilate. They had before alleged, 'We found this fellow perverting the people.' But now their plea is, 'He stirreth up the people.' As Pilate had not been able to find the least trace of his having occasioned a public insurrection, they seem to insist, that if he had not entirely alienated the minds of the people, so as to make them withdraw their allegiance from the Roman government; yet he stirred them up, and occasioned among them many dangerous movements, which might at last terminate in an open revolt. They here, in the present tense, say 'He stirreth up the people,' to shew that Jesus made it his chief business to that very time to excite the people to rebel, and that but a few days before, he had entered Jerusalem in a public manner, which put the whole city in a ferment, (Matth. xxi. 10.)

As for the manner in which Jesus is said to have stirred up the people, they add that it was by 'teaching;' and consequently they accuse him, that he had conveyed seditious principles with his doctrine, and so artfully mingled that pernicious venom with the religious errors which he taught, that his hearers had

greedily imbibed them both. They further observe, that he taught not only in one place, but throughout all Judea; so that the whole country, which hitherto had been the only seat of pure religion, was over-run with his seditious and erroneous doctrines.

Lastly, By adding these words, 'beginning from Galilee to this place,' they give a specimen both of their craft, and their malice. Their craft appears by their endeavouring to discharge themselves of the obligation of bringing proofs of the charge against Christ. Hence they appeal to Galilee, which lay at a distance on the confines of Judea, from whence witnesses could not so soon be produced. They likewise shewed their malice by these words: For they intended to give Pilate a worse opinion of Jesus, because he was of that province; the Galileans at that time being looked upon as a seditious, turbulent, and dissatisfied set of people. Some years before, a Galilean, whose name was Judas, (see Josephus's Jewish Antiquities, B. xviii. C. 1, 2.) had excited a revolt, on account of some new tax imposed upon that country, (Acts v. 37.) Even Pilate himself, not long before, had been put to some trouble by the Galileans; and when some of the revolters came to Jerusalem to sacrifice according to custom, he massacred them in the temple; so that their blood was mingled with that of their sacrifices, (Luke xiii. 1.)

By alleging before Pilate that Jesus had begun to teach in Galilee, which should rather have reminded them of the accomplishment of the prophecy of Isaiah, (chap. ix. 1, 2. compare Matth. iv. 13—16.) the chief Priests intended to intimate, that Jesus was a native of Galilee, and by this means to raise a prejudice against him, as being one of the seditious Galileans. For, as they observed to Pilate, if he was not afraid to cause such a commotion at his public entry into Jerusalem, which was the residence of the Roman governor, what may he not be supposed to

have attempted in the remote northern parts of Judea. These inferences were drawn from probabilities and conjectures; and such false conclusions are generally influenced by the prince of darkness, who knows how to take advantage of them, for the enlargement of his kingdom, and the oppression of Christ and his cause. By this hint, however, the accusers of the blessed Jesus were the occasion of sending him to Herod, because Galilee was under his jurisdiction.

Pilate the more readily embraced this opportunity, as he had a strong desire of getting clear of this troublesome affair in a handsome manner. Therefore, on hearing that Christ had begun to teach in Galilee, and had spent a great part of his time in that country, he concluded that he was a native of Galilee, and immediately asked our Saviour's accusers, 'Whether the man were a Galilean?' The Jews made no difficulty to answer in the affirmative, in hopes of rendering Jesus more odious to Pilate; who possibly might now suspect him of being one of the followers of Judas the Galilean, who but a little time before, had committed so many disorders in that country. Pilate supposing, by this answer of the Jews, that Jesus was a Galilean, and consequently a subject of King Herod, sent him to that Prince, who being a Jew, probably was then at Jerusalem on account of the Passover. This Herod, who was surnamed Antipas, was the son of Herod, (By Malthace,) who massacred the innocent children at Bethlehem and its territories. He was the same Herod, who had caused John the Baptist to be beheaded, (Matth.xiv. 10.) who had likewise before endeavoured to destroy Jesus, (Luke xiii. 31, 32.) probably, from an absurd notion that the soul of John the Baptist was transmigrated into him. Now Herod's jurisdiction particularly extended over that part of Judea which was called Galilee, (hence he is stiled Tetrarch of Galilee, Luke iii. 1.) and on this account frequent

disputes might be supposed to arise between him and the Roman governor Pilate, occasioned by encroachments on each other's rights and prerogatives.

To this Herod the blessed Jesus was now sent; and in this proceeding Pilate's views were political; but at the same time, they were wicked. In the first place, he thought that by this means he should with honour free himself of this troublesome affair about Jesus of Nazareth. He thought this a very proper expedient to avoid condemning a person whom he looked upon as innocent, and incurring the hatred of the Jewish clergy and people. He concluded that as Herod was a Jew, he could better decide this cause, which seemed principally to relate to the Jewish religion. He thought that Herod would certainly be offended with the chief Priests, because they had overlooked him, and had not immediately brought their prisoner before his judgment-seat; and therefore it was not probable that he would order Jesus to be put to death, out of complaisance to them: And in case he should, Pilate imagined that he should have no hand in condemning the innocent. Pilate was likewise pleased to think, that he should at the same time pay a compliment to Herod; so that, on another occasion, Herod might gratify him in return. Such in all probability, were his views and designs in this proceeding.

However, the greatest injustice lay concealed under this pretence of political prudence. For Pilate thus delivered up an innocent and righteous man, whom it was his duty not only to acquit at his tribunal, but also to protect against the rage and malice of his enemies. He sent the blessed Jesus to a judge, who, it was well known, had before saught his life, and had rendered himself odious to all good men by the scandalous and unjust execution of John the Baptist. (See Josephus's Jewish Antiquities, B. xviii. C. 7.) On this account, the accusers of the Lord Jesus desired nothing more, than to be referred to

Herod; being persuaded, that it would be no difficult matter to obtain his order for putting Jesus to death. From this account of the occasion of our blessed Saviour's sufferings before Herod, we shall deduce the following truths.

First, The enemies of true piety at present deal with the members of Christ, as they formerly did with the Head. This we shall endeavour to prove as follows, from the words here explained.

1. As the enemies of our blessed Lord construed his silence to be a sign of bad cause, and on that account urged their groundless accusations with the more boldness; so it is just the same in our days. When the faithful servants of God forbear answering the calumnies, and libels dispersed abroad against them, accounting it an unprofitable waste of time, the world cries out, "We may see what kind of consciences these people have, who have not a word to say in their own defence. If they were innocent, doubtless they would not let such things go unanswered." Thus they slander the more boldly, and publish new accusations without the least sense of discretion or modesty.

2. As our blessed Saviour's enemies were continually repeating their former accusations, only dressing them in a new garb; so is it still the way of persecutors and detractors who renew old calumnies which had long since been refuted by the most convincing apologies, and put them forth into the world under a new appearance.

3. As the accusers of Christ charged him with moving seditions and tumults, in order to instigate the civil power against him; so at present, ill designing men infuse an ill opinion of the good and virtuous into the men of power. They represent them as conceited, self-willed, obstinate persons, who are wanting in due respect to their Sovereigns; who speak evil of dignities and magistrates; who occasion all kinds of trouble and disturbances in

states, and would introduce a new system of religion; so that it were better for government to banish them out of their respective dominions.

4. As the enemies of Christ accuse his doctrine as tainted with the poison of pernicious errors; so now unnecessary admonitions are given against such pretended secret poison. The enemies of the truth cannot deny, that the writings of those authors they condemn contain a great deal of good; but they pretend, without any just grounds, that it is mixt with so much poison as not to be read without extreme danger.

5. As the accusers of the blessed Jesus charged him, that at least he prepared the minds of the people for a revolt, though it was not actually broke out into open rebellion; so in our days, the pure doctrine of Christ is accused as the foundation of all heresy, and pernicious errors; and therefore the followers of Antichrist pretend, that the growing evil is to be opposed in time, and that the sparks which lie concealed in the embers must be quenched, lest they kindle a conflagration, in which the church and state may be involved.

6. As the accusers of Christ represented him as one of that rebellious multitude, which had made an insurrection in Galilee, and refused to pay tribute to the Roman emperor; so it is in our times. Thus Luther was charged by his adversaries with acting in concert with Thomas Muntzer; and thus many faithful servants of God are accused of holding the tenets of the ancient or modern heretics, and of propagating, almost the same impious doctrines.

7. Lastly, As the enemies of our blessed Saviour mingled some truths with their false accusations; as, for instance, that Jesus began to teach in Galilee; but perverted those truths to a very wicked purpose; so likewise many things are laid to the charge of the faithful servants of God, which are really true; but these are mixed with false imputations, and such im-

pious designs as never entered into their thoughts. By this conformity between the ancient and modern opposers of truth, we see that the scene continues much the same to this day, though the persons who act this base part are changed from time to time. But happy is it for us, that satan began at the head and captain of our Salvation, since by that means the way is paved for the members, that they may get over the offence of the cross. Praised be the Lord Jesus for submitting to all these accusations for our sake.

Secondly, Political prudence, unless it be governed by the superior light of God's word, has always shewn itself an enemy to Christ and his cross.

Of this we here see a remarkable instance in Pilate. The political prudence, which he shewed on this occasion, was a carnal prudence, tending to increase the sufferings of the innocent Jesus, and expose him to farther insults; though God at the same time conducted these several incidents, so as to accomplish his decrees. For,

1. By this was fulfilled that prophecy concerning the Messiah, 'The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against the Messiah, or his Anointed,' (Psalm ii. 2. Acts iv. 27.)

2. By this circumstance Christ's innocence became still more conspicuous, and more publicly known.

3. By this delay of the proceedings against our blessed Saviour, his enemies and accusers had some time to reflect on what they were about, before they plunged themselves deeper in blood-guiltiness. However, these were not the effects of Pilate's sagacity or prudence; but of the divine wisdom, which directs every thing to good and wise ends. This is too often the behaviour of magistrates and judges in our days. Political men will not put themselves to the least inconveniency for the sake of the innocent

and good; and when they might, and ought to protect them, they are given up to the popular rage. This is usually covered with some outward pretence, while the mind has another object in view. This is accounted prudence and sagacity by the world; but in the sight of God, it is folly and sin. Without the light of divine grace, no man can discharge a civil post or worldly employment, so as to preserve his integrity, and a conscience void of offence. The power of darkness will prove too strong for a man before he is aware of it, unless he is supported by power from on high. What great reason therefore, have civilians and politicians to apply to the living God for the guidance of his spirit.

Thirdly, Christ, by these circumstances of his passion, was to expiate many kinds of sin. He has atoned,

1. For our suppressions of good motions when they arise in the mind, and our hypocrisy in this particular. Therefore he suffered himself to be charged with raising rebellions and commotions among the people.

2. He has atoned for the turbulent and rebellious motions, which frequently rise in our hearts against the divine law, to which the carnal mind will not be subject; and likewise against the ordinance of the civil power.

3. He has atoned for our voluntary subjection to the power of the prince of darkness. Therefore he submitted to be brought before the civil powers, and even before Herod, a foreign prince to whose government he did not properly belong, being a native of Judea and not of Galilee, and was mocked and reviled before them.

4. He atoned for our fear of man, in omitting to protect truth and innocence.

5. He atoned for the abuse of the Sovereign power by which we endeavour to accomplish our wicked design by rendering our enemy obnoxious to the

government, when it is not in our power to crush him. All these, and the like sins, concurred to occasion this part of our blessed Saviour's sufferings, and will for his sake be forgiven, if we duly repent of them, and believe in him.

II. We now come to consider the sufferings and indignities which Jesus endured before king Herod. Our blessed Lord had, indeed, already suffered a great deal. He had been led about the city in bonds, as a gazing-stock to be reviled and insulted, and had been brought in that manner from Pilate to Herod. It is hardly to be supposed that the procession was slow, and that they led him along gently. On the contrary, it is more probable that the rude multitude dragged him, and pushed him, in a brutish manner; since they were impatient to have the trial over. Thus the sacred body of our blessed Saviour, which, the night before, had sweated blood during his mental agony, was now the more enfeebled by this rude treatment, and was after all this, on the same day, obliged to drag the cross after him to mount Golgotha. But the sufferings which Christ endured before Herod properly consisted of these four particulars.

1. In the disadvantageous opinion which Herod conceived of him. This profligate and voluptuous Prince looked on our Saviour as a sorcerer, who performed surprising wonders by his skill in magic. On this account he was exceeding glad when he was informed, that this famous magician, as he thought, of whom he had already heard such strange things, was to be brought before him. He made no doubt that he should be entertained with the sight of many wonderful performances, which he had only heard of before from other persons. To hear the pure doctrine of the blessed Jesus, and to be instructed by him how to live in chastity, righteousness, and holiness, was no part of Herod's desire; but his impatience was to see Jesus, being persuaded that he would be very glad to exhibit the most surprising

specimens of his art to a person of his high rank, in order to gain his favour, as a means for his deliverance. This unworthy idea, which Herod entertained of our blessed Saviour, is unquestionably to be reckoned as a part of his sufferings. How deep was the abasement of the son of the most High! For as he was afterwards numbered among the transgressors; so here he suffers himself to be reckoned among jugglers, sorcerers, and magicians, that he might open a way to grace and repentance for such deluded engines of satan.

2. The sufferings of Christ before Herod further consisted in many unnecessary, curious, and contemptuous questions, which were put to him. We are told by St. Luke, that Herod 'questioned him in many words,' the purport of which questions, and the manner of asking them, the evangelist has not specified: and as they probably related to such trivial and improper things, that Jesus did not think them worth his notice, it may be presumed, that his questions were suitable to his expectations of seeing Jesus perform some magical wonders. It is not improbable that he enquired, Whether he was John the Baptist? Whether the soul of that prophet was transfused into Jesus? What methods he took instantaneously to cure certain distempers? Whether he pretended to be the king of the Jews? Whether he laid any claim to the province of Galilee? How he could expect to make good his pretensions? &c. besides many sarcastical questions concerning the mean appearance, and the prophetic and kingly office of the blessed Jesus. How sensibly must this have affected our blessed Lord! How must he have grieved to hear so many vain, idle, and sarcastical questions; and this at a time when he was taken up with the most important serious thoughts for reconciling heaven and earth, and, by the shedding of his precious blood, to establish everlasting peace between God and man! He therefore neither returned any

answer to Herod's questions, nor gratified his culpable curiosity by any signs or wonders. He would not cast pearls before swine, nor use his divine power of working miracles to make a show to entertain the wanton eyes of a voluptuous scoffer. He was likewise well assured, that the sentence of death was not to be executed on him by Herod, the Jewish king, but by the Roman governor; therefore he kept silence, that he might be the sooner remanded back to his appointed judge.

3. Our blessed Saviour's sufferings before Herod consisted also in the violent accusations of his adversaries. It is said, by the evangelist, 'the chief Priests and scribes stood, and vehemently accused him.' They bent the bow of malice to its utmost stretch and lay their heads together, to set forth their accusations in the most probable, and at the same time, the most virulent manner. Here they may be supposed to have collected together whatever they could find to object against Christ, not only relating to an insurrection and revolt, but likewise concerning the article of heresy. Thus a favourable opportunity presented itself to Herod, to display his zeal for the Jewish church and religion; for he studied every way to ingratiate himself with the Jews, and for this purpose, had given himself the trouble of coming to Jerusalem at this time on account of the feast of the Passover. Here doubtless they magnified to the utmost the great mischiefs which they pretended, this man had done in Galilee, which was properly Herod's government: How some thousands of the common people had gone frequently after him, and thus given themselves up to an idle and disorderly life, neglecting their families and respective callings; so that they become a burden to the public. They probably represented that this was the man whom his royal father, in his great wisdom, was for destroying when he heard of his birth by the eastern Magi; and that at present, he

had a favourable opportunity of ridding the Jewish church and state of such a pernicious heretic and rebel, and by that means of endearing his memory to the latest posterity. These indeed are the motives, which the spirit of this world often finds successful in exciting the minds of the great and powerful to the most cruel persecutions.

4. Lastly, The sufferings of Christ before Herod likewise consisted in many barbarous insults and mockeries. 'Herod and his men of war,' as the evangelist informs us, 'set him at nought, 'and mocked him; and having arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, sent him again to Pilate.' Herod resented our blessed Lord's silence; looked upon it as a contempt of his dignity, that he would not so much as return an answer to the many questions he had asked him; and therefore he was determined to make Jesus feel the weight of his displeasure, and accordingly mocked and abused him in a barbarous and inhuman manner. He not only insulted our blessed Saviour with all manner of contumelious words, and opprobrious names, but ordered a gorgeous or a white robe to be put on him, as a mock ensign of royalty; for the latter was the usual habit worn at Rome by those who stood candidates for the Consulship, &c. In this garb of mock pageantry, he was first presented to Herod's court as a laughing-stock, and then sent back through the streets of Jerusalem to Pilate.

A white garment, indeed, was no reproach to the blessed Jesus. He was the pure unspotted, and innocent Lamb of God, who was clear from all guilt; which Herod, undesignedly and against his will, was obliged to acknowledge even by his mockery. He was the King of Kings: He was the Prince of Peace, and the conqueror of all his enemies, (Rev. vi. 2.—xix. 11. 14.) He was the Antitype of the high priest of the Jewish church who, on the great day of atonement, went into the holy of holies clothed in a

white vestment. But of these mysteries Herod was entirely ignorant: He looked upon it as a ridicule on the sacred person of Jesus, and this white robe was put on him amidst the loud laughters and brutal mockeries of Herod and his soldiers.

In this contemptuous indignity Herod first set the example. He despised Jesus as a mean obscure person, and one of no account, whose head was stuffed with chimerical notions of royalty, though he had no power to execute his airy projects; and at the same time he mocked the blessed Jesus, and treated him like a child or an ideot. By this scandalous behaviour, however, he debased himself most; for to mock and insult a helpless person, oppressed with grief and misery, by no means becomes a magnanimous prince; on the contrary, it argues a most base and degenerate mind. His court we may be sure were not wanting in imitating their sovereign; particularly his guards, who were then present, endeavoured to entertain him by all manner of ludicrous jests and grimaces, in contempt of the person of the blessed Jesus.

These execrable proceedings so highly pleased Herod, that he harboured no farther hatred against Pilate from that time. For the evangelist adds, that 'Pilate and Herod were the same day made friends together, though before, they were at enmity between themselves,' (Luke xxiii. 12.) They had been more particularly inveterate against each other, since Pilate had caused some of Herod's subjects to be barbarously massacred at Jerusalem. Thus Christ was to be the pledge of this reconciliation, and the means of renewing the friendship between these two great personages. But, at the same time, a divine intimation was given, that through this same Jesus, the enmity between Jews and Gentiles should be abolished, (Pilate being a Gentile, and Herod a Jew) and the peace, which had been interrupted, restored. Hence we shall deduce the following truths:

First, Carnal Ecclesiastics are the bitterest enemies of Christ and his members.

Pilate and Herod acknowledged the innocence of our blessed Saviour; so that they made some scruple of sentencing him to die. But the chief Priests and scribes stood, and vehemently accused him, and stuck at nothing that might take away his character and life. It is still evident, that none of the persecutors of the followers and disciples of Christ came up to worldly minded Ecclesiastics in rancour and cruelty.

Secondly, The great ones of this world are most apt to take offence at the abasement of Christ, and the simplicity and plainness of the christian religion.

It is observable, that our blessed Lord never was but once at a court, and then he was bound and mocked, and reviled. Herod was overjoyed when he saw Jesus: but how much better had it been for him, if he had never seen him! For by insulting this sacred person, he filled up the measure of his sins, and drew the divine vengence on his own head; he being banished not long after this, by the imperial decree. This consideration should move us to be more fervent in our prayers to God for all men, and especially for the kings and rulers of this world, that the divine grace would preserve them from stumbling at this corner stone which God had laid in Sion, and from taking offence at the simplicity of the gospel; and that he would deter them from molesting the faithful followers of Christ. This should also abate our eager desires after high posts and exalted stations, and teach us to rest contented in lower circumstances, in which we are less liable to take offence at the reproach of Christ and the plainness of his salutary doctrines.

THE PRAYER.

Blessed be thy name, O heavenly Father, for giving up thy beloved Son to so many kinds of suffer-

ings, to mockery, insults, reviling, and contempt for our sake. Glory be to thee, O blessed Jesus, for thy willingness in submitting thyself, who art the eternal wisdom, to be the mockery of fools; and for permitting the spirit of ridicule and slander to foam and rage against thy sacred person, that its power might be broken, and that we might not be kept eternally in its bonds. Grant, O Lord, that every one of us may, in the mirror of thine enemies, see the image of his own depravity, and own with shame and sorrow, that he has at least in his heart the latent seeds of all those corruptions which broke out in them; so that we may humble ourselves before thee, and the more earnestly seek the forgiveness of our sins in the merit of the reproaches and sufferings of the bonds, insults, and indignities which thou didst endure. Bless this consideration, and grant that it may tend to the edification and salvation of our souls, for the sake of thy numberless and undeserved sufferings. Amen.

CONSIDERATION IX.

THE UNJUST METHOD PILATE TOOK FOR PROMOTING OUR BLESSED LORD'S RELEASE.

'AND Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and rulers, and the people, said unto them, ye have brought this man unto me as one that perverteth the people: And behold, I having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man, touching those things whereof ye accuse him; no, nor yet Herod: For I sent you to him and lo! nothing worthy of death is done unto him. I will therefore chastise him, and release him. Now at the feast of the passover, the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. Therefore, of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.

And there was one named Barabbas, a notorious prisoner, who lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection,' (Matth. xxvii. 15, 16. Mark. xv. 6, 7. Luke xxiii. 17.)

Pilate had already begun to deviate from the straight and plain ways of justice, and to turn into by-paths, by sending to Herod the Lord Jesus, of whose innocence he was perfectly convinced, with a view of extricating himself out of his embarrassments, and removing this process to another tribunal. But divine providence having disappointed this contrivance of his political sagacity; for Herod sent Jesus back to him, arrayed in a gorgeous robe; he thought on a new expedient for clearing himself with honour of this troublesome affair, without either condemning an innocent person, or drawing on himself the hatred of the Jewish nation.

But before he puts his new scheme in execution, he again makes a public declaration of our Saviour's innocence, in order to pave the way for the design he had formed. To this end, he not only summoned the chief priests and elders who were present, as the most respectable heads of this assembly, and the managers of the indictment against the innocent Jesus; but likewise made a sign to all the people, who stood in multitudes before his judgment-hall, that they should draw nearer, and, with proper silence and attention, hear what he had to propose to them. It is very probable, that by thus solemnly declaring Christ's innocence, Pilate supposed he should at least work on the populace, so that they would insist on the releasing of this innocent person. For it was natural to believe, that among such a multitude that had received so many favours from Jesus, who had healed the sick, and by doing good to all, deserved well of them, or their relations.

Thus Pilate summons the whole people to get together in a body: Let us also draw nearer to his

judgment-seat, and attentively listen to this public testimony of our Redeemer's innocence. It runs thus: 'Ye have brought this man unto me as one that perverteth the people: And behold, I having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man, touching those things whereof ye accuse him; no, nor yet Herod: For I sent you to him, and lo! nothing worthy of death is done unto him.'

In these words of Pilate, we may observe three particulars.

First, He summarily repeats the contents of the charge, which the chief Priests and Elders had preferred against Jesus. 'You have,' said the governor, 'brought this man unto me as one that perverteth the people.' Thus the charge of rebellion was the chief point on which all their other accusations turned, as it was the article into which Pilate, who was a temporal judge and the emperor's vicegerent, would naturally make a strict enquiry. This part of their charge he publicly repeats, by which he gives them to understand, that he well knew their meaning, and was very sensible of the greatness of the crime, which they alleged against Jesus.

Secondly, He in clear and express words certifies, that Christ was innocent of the crime laid to his charge: 'I find no fault in this man, touching those things whereof ye accuse him. As if he had said, You have collected together a formidable heap of complaints, and accused this man of many crimes; yet none of these things doth he acknowledge, and I myself cannot find out the least probability of his being guilty. For, according to all circumstances, and the best information I can get, he never had any such thoughts, and is far from being in a situation to execute a scheme attended with so much difficulty.

Thirdly, He confirms his testimony by a double proof, *viz.* by appealing to his own examination of Jesus, and also to Herod's judgment concerning him. In the first place, he appeals to his own examination,

of which they had been witnesses: Behold, 'I have examined him before you,' *i. e.* I have questioned him, enquired into his case, compared his confession with your charge, and his answer with the depositions of your witnesses, and done every thing which could be expected from an impartial judge. And as by the Roman laws the plaintiff and defendant are to be confronted, (Acts xxv. 16.) I have likewise acted agreeably to this, and have examined him before you, who were present at my enquiry into his case. Therefore yourselves, would you but speak the truth, must own, that you cannot prove the man guilty of those crimes of which you accuse him.

In the next place, he appeals to Herod's judgment, adding, 'No, nor yet Herod.' Besides, Herod has not found the man guilty of any crime: For I sent you to him, and lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him.' He probably added, You know that there has been a misunderstanding between Herod and myself, and consequently he would hardly have acquitted the prisoner in complaisance to me. Besides, I did not acquaint him with my opinion of the man's innocence; but left the whole to his own penetration. You yourselves were also present there, and doubtless were not wanting to set off your accusation in the best manner. But he has been found guilty of nothing worthy of death; which I conclude from Herod's sending him back to me, and by the white robe in which he ordered him to be clothed. By this, I suppose, his design is to shew, that he looks upon him as a person of a crazed imagination, who ought to be laughed at for his chimeras, but far from having done any thing worthy of death. Now, you cannot but acquiesce in the judgment of Herod, who is of your own religion, and sovereign of Galilee, where you pretend this man has been most busy in sowing sedition. If this were true, Herod, as the ruler of the country, must have had the best information of it. Such was Pilate's testimony of our bles-

sed Saviour's innocence, from which, before we proceed any further, we shall deduce the following truths.

1. As the innocence of Jesus Christ was to be imputed to Jews and Gentiles at the divine tribunal, so it was likewise to be made manifest at the tribunals of Jews and Gentiles.

The perfect innocence of our blessed Saviour was to be the only means for reconciling men to God, and the veil that was to cover their sins. Now, as the whole human race, until the incarnation of Christ, had been divided into Jews and Gentiles with respect to religion; the testimony of his innocence was to be corroborated by the unanimous consent of Jews and Gentiles. Pilate was a Gentile, Herod, on the contrary, was a Jew. Both these great personages, though they differed widely in their religion and politics, though they were at open enmity with each other, yet agreed in this; that Jesus had done nothing worthy of death. Indeed, the innocence of Christ was infinitely beyond what the judges could possibly conceive. He was not only innocent of any crimes punishable with death, but there was not the least shadow of guilt or sin in him. For, as St. Paul observes, 'Such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens, (Heb. vii. 26.) He was therefore so far from meriting death, that he did not deserve the least mockery or abuse. It was sufficient, according to human laws, that Jesus was acquitted of the charge brought against him. But notwithstanding all this, he was afterwards sentenced to die. Hence it may be easily conjectured, that the cause of his death did not lie in his own person, but in us. Oh, that we may be truly sensible, that our transgressions were the real cause of the death of Christ! For, we, by our sins, laid the foundation of the sentence, which God pronounced against his Son. How ought this knowledge to humble us, and

at the same time, to put us in a condition of laying hold on Christ's innocence, as our own, and pleading it at the divine tribunal.

2. Charity requires that we should clear our neighbour when he is slandered, and bear witness to his innocence.

A christian is bound to love his neighbour as himself. Now, as we are all ready enough to justify our own innocence, when aspersed by calumnies and malicious reports, it is therefore likewise our duty to be concerned for our neighbour's innocence, and, as much as in us lies, to protect it from injuries. In the instance before us, Pilate publicly clears our blessed Saviour's character before all the people, and by his testimony of Christ's innocence, contradicts the rulers of the Jewish nation, who charged him with being a malefactor. This public testimony of Christ's innocence, given by the Roman governor, is to be considered as a prelude of what was afterwards to come to pass in the Roman empire. For several of the emperors bore witness to the innocence of the followers of Christ, in public instruments, and mandates to the governors of provinces, enjoining them to forbear molesting the Christians, and putting them to death. The very persecutors and executioners of those harmless persons were often sensible of their innocence, and could not forbear giving testimony of it.

But this heathen governor will rise in judgment against many Christians, who have behaved very differently towards the innocent members of Christ, from what he did towards our Saviour with regard to his innocence. Many are convinced of the innocence of the faithful servants of Christ, when the world asperses them with the most virulent slanders; but will not speak a single word in their defence, from a pusillanimous fear of being suspected to have any connection with them. Others are still more culpable, who are so far from taking the part of innocence,

that they concur in reviling and loading it with calumnies. There is a third class still more abandoned than either of these, who, like Herod, make a mock of suffering innocence; and others again, who in the gall of bitterness, like Pilate, contrary to their own knowledge and conscience, join in oppressing truth and innocence. All these offend grossly against the ninth commandment, though some sin with more aggravated guilt than others.

Pilate, having thus publicly borne witness to the innocence of the blessed Jesus, makes use of two unwarrantable expedients, in order to procure his releasement. If he had acted agreeably to the conviction of his conscience, he would have discharged this innocent person, notwithstanding the accusations of the chief Priests, and have resolutely protected him against their malice and rage. But a mean, abject fear of man, and worldly policy, led him into crooked ways; so that he attempted to gain his point by craft, that he might not make the chief Priests his enemies, by an open affront. To this purpose he makes two proposals to them.

The first proposal of Pilate was, to chastise Jesus, and to let him go. The rules of justice required, that he should discharge the innocent; but to offer to scourge him, was the height of injustice. If Jesus was guilty, why should he release him? And if he was innocent, why should he offer to scourge him? Thus Pilate was prompted by his carnal wisdom to have recourse to a most iniquitous method. He was for satisfying his troubled conscience, and therefore scrupled to execute the sentence. But he was, at the same time, willing to humour the inveterate hatred of the Jews against the blessed Jesus, and to support the reputation of his venerable accusers: He therefore proposed to scourge him, that it might not be thought that the person accused was found entirely innocent. This he concluded to be the best expedient, on the one side for paying some regard to jus-

tice, and on the other as a salvo for the honour of the chief Priests and elders; who now might clear themselves to the people, by saying, that Jesus of Nazareth had been found in a great measure guilty, though Pilate, out of his clemency, &c. was pleased to spare his life. Besides, he imagined, that the chief Priests would the rather be contented with this proceeding: since by being scourged, which was an ignominious punishment inflicted only on slaves, Jesus would be rendered contemptible; so that he would lose all his credit with the people, and be deserted by all his adherents. Had this proposal of Pilate been accepted, it would have been matter of great triumph to the infernal powers, as some kind of blemish would have remained on the oppressed innocence of our blessed Lord. But God directed this circumstance contrary to the intention of this heathen governor. The innocence of the blessed Jesus was destined to shine forth with unsullied lustre on this day. It was not only made known, that he had done nothing worthy of death; but a certain person was likewise to declare, that he had done nothing amiss; nothing that deserved the slightest punishment. Thus God brought this affair to quite another issue, than what Pilate in his worldly policy had projected.

Pilate's second proposal was as follows. He put the Lord Jesus on the same footing with a notorious malefactor, and offered the people the privilege of choosing which of the two they would have released. Hereby Pilate, who wavered in his mind, like a reed shaken by the wind, was for trying whether he could get Jesus released without any chastisement. This scheme was more likely to succeed than the former, as it put it in the power of the people to release Jesus; for many of them had received extraordinary benefits from him, and they were in general more favourably disposed towards him than the chief Priests and elders; who, as Pilate well knew, had delivered him out of envy, (Matth. xxvii. 28.) This subtle politician saw

into this mystery of iniquity, and concluded that nothing was to be done with the chief Priests; since it was too much their interest to destroy Jesus, who had struck at their dignity and power by his doctrines. With regard to this incident, we may observe,

First, What induced Pilate to make this proposal. It was occasioned by the following custom: 'Now at the feast of the passover, the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. Therefore, of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.'

It is somewhat dubious, whether this custom was introduced by the Jews or by the Romans. From St. John's account, (chap. xviii. 39.) who says, 'Ye have a custom that I should release one unto you at the passover,' some conjecture, that it was a custom of Jewish origin, in memory of their deliverance out of Egypt, of which the feast of the passover was a commemoration; and that the Romans, after subduing Judea, had indulged the Jews in the continuance of this usage as some shadow of liberty. Others are of opinion, that this custom was introduced by the Romans, as a favour shewn to the Jews, who resorted to Jerusalem from all parts of the world at the feast of the passover, that they might celebrate the feast with the better temper, and be less liable to revolt against the Roman government. Be this as it will, it was a custom contrary to the law of nature, which does not allow a convicted malefactor to be released without punishment; and likewise contrary to the law of Moses, which absolutely excludes from pardon all murderers, or shedders of man's blood. However, as the custom had once taken place, the Jews were more tenacious of it than of God's ordinances; and therefore Pilate, to prevent any disturbance, was under a necessity of releasing a prisoner to them, whom they would. This was what gave occasion to the proposal.

Secondly, The criminal, whom Pilate designed to make use of to compass his end, deserves our notice; he is thus described: 'And there was at that time one named Barabbas, a notorious prisoner, who lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection.' This man is described,

1. By his name. He was called Barabbas, a name at that time common among the Jews, which signifies a 'son of the father.'

2. He is described by his crimes, two of which are here specified, namely, sedition and murder. This was a time when the spirit of sedition prevailed among the Jews; so that the least pretence sufficed to make them take up arms against the Roman government, when they used to commit all manner of crimes and outrages. In one of these commotions, Barabbas had distinguished himself by heading a gang of seditious persons, and had even killed a man in the tumult. As the Roman governor had sent a party of soldiers to disperse the revolters, he had probably killed one or two of them in the encounter, so that both these crimes rendered him utterly unworthy of any favour or intercession.

3. This criminal is described by the circumstances he was in. Barabbas was in prison, and very probably, when the feast was over, was to be executed as on example to others, who were of the same turbulent spirit. Pilate had also at that time other prisoners, (since two other malefactors were crucified with Jesus) but he pitched upon this notorious criminal to be put in competition with the Lord Jesus; flattering himself that the people would never sue for the discharge of such a wretch; for a man-slayer, according to their law, was to die without mercy. As to the chief Priests and Elders, Pilate did not imagine that they would so far debase themselves, and, by interceding for a rebel, render themselves obnoxious to the court of Rome, by seeming to favour popular

tumults. But Pilate was greatly mistaken in his expectations, as will be shewn at large in the following Consideration. From what has been here said, we shall deduce these truths:

First, Christ, by this circumstance of his passion, was to expiate our sins of several kinds. He has,

1. Expiated the culpable improbity of many thousands, who act contrary to their own conviction, and in their behaviour, do violence to the dictates of their own consciences. For instance, every one is convinced that lying is an infamous sin, brought into the world by the devil, who is the father of lies; yet for the hopes of a small profit, many do not stick at adding lie to lie. Many thousands are convinced that drunkenness excludes men from the kingdom of God, (Gal. v. 21.) yet, on every slight temptation, are drawn into it. Many thousands are convinced that evil company is one of Satan's most dangerous snares; and yet they easily suffer themselves to be entangled in it, so as to be unable to extricate themselves.

2. He has expiated the sins of those who act against their conscience, in order to please others.

3. He has expiated the sins of evil customs, as this of releasing a malefactor on account of the feast. Such customs, like an impetuous torrent, draw many from their integrity, and hurry them away into sin.

4. He has expiated the sins of those who do not behave in their office with probity and unshaken firmness; but sometimes from fear, sometimes from the hope of any worldly advantage, turn aside from the right way. Now, as all these, and the like sins; had a share in the sufferings of Christ, it behoves us to detest and abhor them; and if we are conscious that we are guilty of all or any of them, we ought sincerely to repent of such sins, to amend our lives, and by a lively faith, to make Christ our refuge to screen us from the rigour of the divine justice.

Secondly, Evil customs, especially those which have a specious appearance, in time acquire such veneration, that no man dares to act or speak against them. It is said here, that Pilate must of necessity release a prisoner at the feast. As this custom had been once established, Pilate might have reason to apprehend very great disturbances, had he taken upon him to supersede it, and introduce an innovation. This is generally the case in private evil habits.—When a man is accustomed to any evil, which by long practice is become a habit, it tyrannizes over him; so that he becomes a miserable slave to it, and is led by it as an ox to the slaughter. Whoever therefore finds himself entangled with the snares of satan; whoever is conscious that he suffers sin to gain dominon over him, let him throw himself at the feet of his Redeemer. What seems impossible to corrupt nature is possible with God.

Thirdly, It is a very critical and dangerous point to commit the least injustice.

This was Pilate's case. He thought that it was more safe to scourge an innocent man, than to crucify him and put him to death. But by his example we may be taught, what a slippery path this is; since, afterwards, for want of the firmness becoming his office, he was carried to commit a greater, which he was for preventing by doing a smaller act of injustice. For at length 'he released Barabbas unto them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified,' (Matt. xxvii. 26.) To think it advisable to commit a small sin, in order to prevent a greater, is a false way of reasoning. If a person finds himself unable to prevent the commission of two sins at once, he must indeed chiefly exert himself to avoid the greater sin: but he is not to give his consent to, or by any means to promote, the smaller. If we are by faith united to Jesus Christ, and strengthened by his spirit, we shall choose to lay down our lives, rather than offend our Saviour by the deliberate

commission of any presumptuous sin. The Lord give us this resolution, and so establish and strengthen it in us, that the gates of hell may never be able to prevail against us.

THE PRAYER.

AND now, O faithful and ever-living Saviour, praised be thy name for condescending to permit that, through the tyranny of evil customs, thy sacred person should be rejected by the whole Jewish nation, and an infamous murderer be preferred before thee. May we with grateful hearts acknowledge the benefits derived to us from it; and may we be constrained by this instance of thy love, willingly to renounce all the evil customs of the world, and all those sins which brought thee down into such an abyss of humiliation and sufferings. Grant this for the sake of those meritorious sufferings which thou didst endure for us. Amen.

CONSIDERATION X.

THE MURDERER BARABBAS PUT IN COMPETITION WITH THE LORD JESUS.

'AND when they were gathered together, Pilate saith unto them, Ye have a custom, that I should release one unto you at the passover. Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them. But Pilate answered them, saying, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ? Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews? For he knew that the chief Priest had delivered him for envy. And when he was set down on the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream, because of him. But the

chief Priests and Elders persuaded and moved the multitude, that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. 'They then cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas! Now Barabbas was a robber.' (Matt. xxvii. 17—21. Mark xv. 8.—11. Luke xxiii. 18, 19. John xviii. 39, 40.)

In the last Consideration we have observed, how Pilate had recourse to various by-ways, and unjust expedients, for promoting the releasement of the innocent Jesus; how he proposed scourging him; how he put it to the people's choice, whether they would have Jesus released, or Barabbas a notorious rebel and murderer, being in hopes that the multitude would prefer our blessed Saviour to such an odious criminal. But this affair turned out contrary to Pilate's expectations, as appears from that part of the history of our Saviour's passion which is cited above; where we are informed that the murderer Barabbas was publicly set in competition with the blessed Jesus. In this account we shall consider,

First, What preceded this incident.

Secondly, Pilate's management of the affair.

Thirdly, The intimation God gave Pilate on this occasion.

Fourthly, The effect of this proposal made by Pilate to the people.

I. As to what preceded this incident we shall observe,

1. What happened on Pilate's side.

2. What happened with regard to the people.

1. On Pilate's side it was preceded by a proposal. For the Jews being gathered together, Pilate said unto them, 'Ye have a custom that I should release one unto you at the Passover.' The people, who were come to Jerusalem from all parts on the account of the Passover, had, some out of hatred against Christ, and some out of curiosity to see the issue of the affair, assembled in great numbers in the court

before Pilate's hall of judgment. Pilate laid hold of this opportunity, and put the Jews in mind of the custom which, according to St. John's account, had hitherto been observed: You have, says he, a custom that I should release one to you at the Passover. As to the nature of this custom and its origin, I have just touched upon it in the preceding Consideration. Pilate was no stranger to the zealous adherence of the Jews to the ordinances and customs transmitted down to them from their ancestors, and well knew that they would rather suffer death, than be deprived of their ancient privileges. Therefore, he thought of throwing a bait among the people, who looked upon this custom as an essential part of their liberty, and by that means gaining their hearts; so that they might make use of that favourable opportunity, and release Jesus.

2. Hereupon followed what St. Mark relates of the people, in these words, according to some copies: 'And the multitude went up,' *i. e.* they drew nearer to Pilate's house, in order to have a distinct view of the two persons exhibited together. In other copies of the Greek text the words are, 'The multitude cried aloud, and began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them.' The minds of the people seem to have been so taken up with the proceedings against Jesus of Nazareth, that they never thought of this their customary privilege; nor had they claimed it of the Roman governor. But when they were put in mind of it by Pilate himself, their desire that this ancient custom should be observed, revived and grew to such a head, that it broke out into tumultuous outcries, demanding that Pilate would immediately proceed to business; so that their customs and privileges might not suffer any prejudice. From these circumstances we shall deduce the following doctrines:

1. Our deliverance from the tyranny of evil customs cost our blessed Lord very dear.

St. Peter observes, that Christ hath redeemed us from our vain converstion, received by tradition, [*i. e.* directed and governed by ancient maxims and customs] not with silver and gold, but with his precious blood, (1 Peter i. 18.) Therefore he now stood before Pilate, because he was to feel the tyrannical power of ancient customs, and how the god of this world holds weak men so fastly bound with these fetters. Now in order to deprive these evil worldly maxims and customs of their power and dominion, and to procure for us absolute deliverance from them, the innocent and spotless Lamb of God suffered the tyrannical violence of such customs to rage against his person; and at last permitted that, through the observance of such an ancient privilege, he should be rejected and sentenced to death. Since therefore, the Son of God, for our deliverance from worldly customs, thus shed his precious blood, far be it from us, by our levity and irresolution, to forfeit again that privilege which he so dearly purchased, by giving ourselves up as slaves to sinful customs and ill habits. Some sins, indeed, by long custom are grown into a fashion, to which few are so scrupulous as not to conform; yet far be it from us, that we should suffer ourselves to be carried away by that overflowing stream. And though our singularity should expose us to the laughter of the world, let us not hesitate to suffer ourselves to be ridiculed with the Son of God, rather than tread under foot that precious ransom, by which he has redeemed us from the customs of our fathers.

2. Men usually shew most zeal for, and attachment to those things which concern their carnal liberty.

This custom of the Jews had some shadow of liberty; and the people were extremely fond of a privilege, by which they had a right annually to claim the releasment of a malefactor at the passover. Therefore, on the first intimation from Pilate, that they

might now make use of this privilege, their desire of it declared itself with great vehemence, and broke out into tumultuous clamours. This is always the case when men take it into their heads, that the unwarrantable liberty, or rather licentiousness, which they have assumed contrary to the Word of God, is likely to be restrained by wholesome laws. Nothing can equal their violence to oppose all such necessary restrictions. Oh, that men would shew such a zealous attachment for true liberty! such an inflamed desire of being released from the bonds of satan! Oh, that this desire would prompt them to prostrate themselves before God, to lift up their voice, and with tears implore him, that he would deliver them from the thraldom of their sins and pernicious lusts, and 'make them free by the Son, that they may be free indeed, (John viii. 36.)

II. We come, in the next place, to consider how Pilate conducted this affair. The people having claimed the observance of this old custom, he immediately sent for Barabbas from the prison, where he had hitherto been kept, and ordered him to be exhibited to public view, placing him near Jesus. Then Pilate put this question to the people, 'Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ? Will ye that I release unto you the king of the Jews?' Never were two persons of characters so different placed on the same footing; one being the eternal Son of God, who was a pattern of the most perfect innocence and holiness, and the other a notorious robber, murderer, and rebel.

At first sight, this scheme of Pilate seems very well concerted. For,

First, He confines the choice to two persons, namely, Jesus whom he knew to be innocent, and who, by healing the sick, raising the dead, &c. had endeared himself to the people; and an infamous malefactor who had committed murder, shed innocent blood, *and had* been taken in the very act of rebellion.

Secondly, By this contrivance he got the whole affair out of the hands of the chief Priests, who had delivered Jesus for envy, into those of the people, among whom he knew that our blessed Lord had not a few disciples and adherents.

Thirdly, In his address to the people he gave our Saviour such names or titles, as might most effectually recommend him to their favour. His words are, 'JESUS, of whom it is said he is, or who is called, CHRIST,' *i. e.* the Messiah whom ye have so long expected. He likewise entitles him 'the King of the Jews.' By this, he puts them in mind how the Jewish people, but a few days before, when Jesus entered Jerusalem, by their shouts and acclamations had, as it were proclaimed him king of Israel; so that they ought to consider, what a disgrace it would be to the Jews to suffer their King to be thus undeservedly crucified.

Fourthly, By putting a rebel in competition with Christ; Pilate was in hopes that the chief Priests, out of caution and prudence, would not interfere in the matter. For they themselves had accused Jesus of rebellion; and strongly insisted on his being put to death, because he perverted the people, and disuaded them from paying the tribute due to the emperor. Now as they had not been able to produce one legal proof of any seditious action against Jesus; whereas, Barabbas, on the contrary, had been taken in the very fact, heading a party of men in a tumult; Pilate thought the chief Priests and Elders would never declare for a rebel, nor advise the people to procure his release; since it would render them suspected by the Romans of favouring sedition, which was a capital crime, and seldom or never pardoned by the governor. Thus he thought he had disposed every thing in the best manner by his political sagacity, and, in his heart, congratulated himself on the success of his contrivance.

But in all these human schemes there was a great mixture of injustice. For,

1. Pilate exposes to the chance of being crucified a person of whose innocence he was convinced; and delivers Jesus up, and with him justice itself, to the caprice of the populace. Thus he departed from the plain direct path of justice, as laid down by the laws, and turned aside into a very slippery way, which was full of stumbling blocks. 'He knew that the High Priests had delivered him for envy.' Should not this have induced him to consider the great influence, which the rank and authority of the chief Priests and Elders gave them over the people? Ought he not, as a wise statesman, to have reflected on the lengths, which envy is known to run on its restlessness and rancour, and what infamous actions it causes men to perpetrate?

2. Pilate by this action obscures the innocence of Christ, after having borne a public testimony of it, in the displaying of which Divine Providence, at this time more especially, was concerned. For had this artifice of Pilate succeeded, and the people demanded that Jesus might be released, it might have been said by the chief Priests, &c. that popular clamours had prevailed, and that it was not because of his innocence that Jesus had been released, but because he was favoured by the people; who had before opposed his being carried to prison, and consequently obstructed the course of justice. Thus Pilate, in this affair, seems to have been an engine of satan, who, above all things, wanted to fix a blemish on the innocence of his conqueror.

3. By this unjust expedient, he precludes himself from all opportunity of urging any thing further in behalf of our Saviour's innocence, with proper vigour and efficacy. For after the Jews had once desired Barabbas to be released to them, Jesus stood actually condemned, and rejected by the majority of the people.

4. He acted contrary to the true interest of the commonwealth; for by the hopes of escaping pu-

nishment he, as it were, encouraged persons of turbulent and seditious spirits, with which Judea then swarmed, to the commission of all kind of violence and outrages. This was manifestly running counter to the duty of his office; he being appointed by the Roman emperor to keep a watchful eye and a strict hand over all tumultuous proceedings. Hence we learn:

First, That he who consults other men in dubious cases, without any regard to God's will, which is the supreme rule for our behaviour and conduct, will be overcome by the first temptation that assaults him.

Pilate asks the people, 'Will ye that I release unto you Barabbas, or Jesus?' whereas he ought to have acted according to the Roman law, or the dictates of his own conscience, for both of them informed him that the innocent ought to be released. There are still too many nominal Christians, who are such slaves to men; many who, from a servile desire of pleasing others, stick at no kind of injustice in private life; many judges who accommodate themselves more to the corrupt taste of others than to the unalterable rule of rectitude. That these sins might be forgiven to those who are heartily sorry for them, the Supreme Judge and Prophet has suffered, and been sentenced to death, through his judge's pliableness to the will of others.

Secondly, Christ by these circumstances of his passion has expiated many sins committed by men, on condition of faith and repentance.

1. He has expiated our arrogant desires, when, seduced by self-love, we are for appearing better, more wise, more learned, or more pious, than we in reality are. We are fond of comparing ourselves with those that are worse than we are. In order therefore to atone for this haughty desire of our heart, Christ suffered himself to be shewn in public and ranked with the most abandoned malefactor.

2. Our blessed Saviour has expiated our desire of

reconciling light and darkness, Christ and Belial, God and the world, holiness and sin. The contrariety between these is no less than that of Christ and Barabbas.

3. He has expiated all indirect ways of wresting justice, all contrivances of carnal wisdom and worldly policy, which generally give an ill appearance to a good cause.

4. He has expiated that depravity which, from a desire of ingratiating oneself with men, and gaining their favour, gives up the cause of Christ and his members to the option of a licentious populace, from whom no justice is to be expected.

5. He has expiated that depravity by which men so frequently act contrary to conviction, and rather conform to the opinions of other people, than the dictates of their own conscience. As these sins contributed to aggravate the sufferings of the innocent Jesus, it should inspire us with an utter detestation, and sincere repentance, of them.

III. We are further to observe the intimation which God gave Pilate on this occasion. The account of this remarkable incident is mentioned only by St. Matthew, who relates it thus: 'When he was set down on the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream, because of him.' Thus God gave Pilate an admonition, and made his own wife the instrument to convey it, who in this affair was free from all prejudice or partiality; for she was not of the Jewish religion, nor did she know whether Jesus was guilty or innocent. But, as her husband had been disturbed in his rest by the early application of the High Priest and Elders, she continued in bed for some time after; and falling asleep again, she had a very uneasy dream, in which she probably saw, as in a vision, the whole trial of Jesus before her husband; how a man perfectly innocent was brought before Pilate, and he

solicited to give orders for the execution of the sentence of death passed on him; and possibly she had some presage of the misfortunes that should fall on him and his whole family, should he so far give way to the clamours of the people as to commit such an act of injustice. In this dream she had suffered much, and was extremely disordered by the impression it had made on her mind. When she awaked out of her sleep, she heard an uncommon noise, and when she saw through the window what a crowd was gathered before the house, she was seized with a dreadful apprehension that her dream would prove too true. Upon this, she instantly dispatched a person to her husband, who was sitting on the judgment-seat, to conjure him not to have any hand in the trial; adding, that the prisoner was an innocent just man, and that if he should be prevailed on to consent to his execution, he would be guilty of a most heinous crime.

This dream has been viewed in various lights by the learned. Some look on it as a work of satan, who imposed on Pilate's wife, in order to prevent our Saviour's death, and consequently the redemption of mankind. If this had been the case, satan would have acted inconsistently with himself, by endeavouring, at one and the same time, to hinder the condemnation of Christ, and to instigate the chief Priests, the elders, and all the people, with tumultuous clamours to insist on the execution of the sentence. From all the circumstances of this transaction, it may reasonably be concluded that the evil spirit was perplexed within himself, to find out what Jesus of Nazareth could be; and that he was not quite certain that he was the seed of the woman which was to bruise his head, thinking Christ's appearance much too mean and despicable for any such attempt. It is therefore probable, that satan had no concern in this dream; but that it was rather a vision sent from God or some good spirit, in order to ad-

monish Pilate, who was now on the point of committing the most flagitious act of injustice, and at the same time to cast a lustre on our blessed Saviour's innocence; for it was then extremely wronged and obscured, by Pilate's injurious expedient of placing him in competition with a murderer, but was set in a very glorious light by divine providence, by means of this vision. Hence we may deduce the following truths:

1. Dreams of admonition are neither to be totally rejected, nor absolutely credited, so as to occasion any terror or mistrustful fears in the mind.

There are properly three kinds of dreams. Some may be called natural, which arise from the images that have occupied the mind in the course of the day, and consequently are the effect of a wakeful and busy imagination. There are likewise dreams infused by satan, inciting, even in sleep, evil desires, by the representation of sinful objects. Lastly, there are divine dreams, when God, by the means of a good spirit, makes something known to a man in his sleep, as a pre-admonition, either of some misfortune, or of something that may tend to the good of himself or others. But, since it is not always very easy to distinguish between these different kinds of dreams, particularly the natural and divine, it behoves us not to be too hasty and credulous, so as to be driven to and fro by every airy representation of fancy; nor absolutely to reject such admonitions, since they may be the vehicle of some secret intimation from divine providence. This consideration, at least, should make us careful and circumspect, and in order to find, and walk in, this middle way, proper assistance and wisdom must be implored from above in all dubious cases.

2. The admonitions which God permits to happen to a man, in order to restrain him from the perpetration of sin, will be imputed to him, if disregarded, to his greater condemnation. This intimation

of divine providence, with which Pilate was made acquainted on his judgment-seat, is not only related by the evangelist, but is likewise set down in God's book of remembrance, and when the sins of Pilate shall be laid open with all their aggravating circumstances at the great day of account, it will enhance his guilt. Let every one therefore reverently admire the providence of God, regard its kind admonitions, and with filial obedience be thereby restrained from sin.

IV. Lastly, We are to consider the effect which this proposal made by Pilate had both on the chief Priests and on the people.

First, As for the chief Priests and elders, they urged the people to require, that Barabbas should be released, and that Jesus might be put to death. Probably, the messenger sent by Pilate's wife had desired him to withdraw from the judgment-hall, and upon this Pilate went to see what his wife had farther to say. The chief Priests and elders made use of this interval to mingle with the people, and by all kinds of persuasions to gain their suffrages. Or, perhaps, the message from Pilate's wife was delivered to him in an audible voice, as he sat on the seat of judgment; so that he was very much affected with it, and the people desired, at the same time, a few minutes to consult about the choice. This opportunity the doctors and rulers of the people laid hold of, to infuse into the minds of the ignorant multitude a determined rage against the person of Jesus, and, like abandoned incendiaries, to kindle in them the flames of envy and hatred. Upon this occasion, they may be supposed to have left no stone unturned to compass their inhuman drift: They threatened to cut off from the synagogue all who should vote for Jesus and promised their favour to those who should declare for Barrabbas. As for those who had a tender conscience, and scrupled to vote for the release of a murderer; they made them easy by assuring them:

that they would be answerable for it, and that thus they might safely vote in favour of this murderer. They added, that if Barabbas had committed a false step, it was through a zeal for God's honour, and that he was a stickler for the pure doctrine of the Jewish church; that Jesus of Nazareth, on the contrary, was a known heretic, who seduced others by the speciousness of his false doctrines, and had murdered more souls than Barabbas had bodies; that it was not fit such a wretch should be tolerated any longer among God's people; and that a more acceptable service could not be done to the God of Israel, than to join in delivering him up to the most shameful death, in order to be cut off from the Jewish church as an accursed member. For such remonstrances to irritate the minds of the people, the chief Priests were not at a loss.

Secondly, On the common people, who were otherwise better affected to Christ than the chief Priests and scribes, these misrepresentations produced this dreadful effect, that the whole multitude cried aloud, 'Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas,' (Luke xxiii. 18.) Thus satan, by a wonderful artifice, in a few moments made such a vast multitude unanimously cry out, 'Away with him!' O what a dismal spectacle was this, that the prince of life should be rejected, and a murderer released! How wonderful was the wise appointment of God, that the Son of his love should be the object of universal hatred, that he might regain for us the love of God, which we had unhappily forfeited! We shall conclude this consideration with the following observations:

1. During the persecutions of Christ and his members, the thoughts and inclinations of many hearts are laid open.

By this public competition between Christ and Barabbas, were discovered the latent corruptions of the human heart. Pilate, the chief Priests, and the

people, betrayed the abominable corruptions which lay at the bottom of their hearts. Here it was evidently seen who were the greatest movers of sedition. The chief Priests had before accused Jesus, alleging that he stirred up the people; but here it is said, the chief Priests moved the people. Their misrepresentations were the boisterous winds that stirred the troubled sea of popular rage. This is still the way of those who seduce the people. They always cry out against any appearance of sedition, when they have no interest in it themselves: But they are the first to raise disturbances, when they can compass any sinister end, or oppress godliness and innocence, by popular tumults. By the instance before us, we may likewise see what an unsteady reed the people is, and how easily shaken; how little their acclamations and applauses are to be relied on; how uncertain their approbation, how precarious their favour, how variable their inclinations, how short-lived their gratitude. Here we may learn to know what the world in general is, since it could prefer a flagitious murderer to the prince of life.

2. As good Ministers make it their business to lead men to Christ, so unfaithful teachers seduce men from him.

Of this the doctors of the Jewish nation gave a manifest proof, by poisoning the minds of the people with many prejudices, with hatred and rancour against the innocent Jesus; so that at length they induced them publicly to reject the Lord of Glory, and to demand the release of a murderer in preference to him. It must have touched these unfaithful shepherds to the quick, that Jesus should call them thieves, robbers, and murderers, (John x. 8—10.) But here they made good the words of our blessed Lord, and betrayed the inveterate malice and wickedness, which they secretly harboured in their breasts. For, by the great pains they took in gaining over the multitude to favour Barabbas, did not they shew them-

selves patrons and companions of robbers and murderers? This is too often the case in our days. Many false teachers have a greater regard to their own temporal advantage, than for the honour of Christ, and his gospel. It therefore behoves every one who is destined for the ministry incessantly to pray to God, that he would plant in his heart such a tender regard for Christ, such a holy zeal for his honour and glory, that he may be ready, with joy, to sacrifice his own honour and interest, if he can by that means bring souls to Christ. The saying of John the Baptist should be the motto of such a conscientious minister of the gospel, 'He must increase, but I must decrease,' (John iii. 30.)

3. It is a heinous sin for a man of great authority, and influence over the people, to impose upon their ignorance, and to make them the instruments for executing a wicked design.

In the instance before us, the chief Priests incurred the guilt of this heinous sin. And the antichristian persecutors of the church of Rome tread in their footsteps, and like them keep the people in the grossest ignorance, that they may turn and wind them any way as their interest may require. How unhappy is the people of whom it may be said, 'They who lead thee cause thee to err!' (Isaiah iii. 12.) But woe to those designing hypocrites, who take advantage of the ignorance and simplicity of the people, to cause them to err! 'Cursed is he that maketh the blind to go out of the way: And all the people shall say, Amen,' (Deut. xxii. 18.)

4. Jesus Christ is still daily rejected among Christians.

Though our ears no longer hear those dreadful words, away with Jesus, yet many thousands prefer Barabbas to him; for as often as we prefer our sinful lusts to the commands of our Saviour, and fulfil the former, while we postpone the latter, we hold *with Barabbas*, and reject the blessed Jesus. The

cry of all the proud and ambitious is, Away with this Jesus, who would have us sacrifice our honour to his! The cry of the voluptuous is, Away with Jesus, who would have us renounce the pleasures of this world, take up our cross, and mortify the flesh! The cry of the whole multitude of the covetous is, Away with this Jesus, who would have us renounce our mammon, and give part of the money which we have earned with so much pains, in alms to the poor! We shall follow no such leader. This is the cry of all the children of antichrist. On every allurement to sin, Christ and satan, as it were, stand in competition; the former admonishes, the latter intices; Christ enjoins, satan forbids. If we give way to the temptation, we side with satan, who was a rebel and murderer from the beginning, and, reject the blessed Jesus. Alas! this wickedness is daily acted. Every one, who will not submit to the easy yoke of Christ, and obey his precepts, rejects him, and makes choice of Barabbas. Every one who delights in and countenances vice, and on the contrary, suppresses true religion and virtue; every one who persecutes the godly, and connives at the impiety of the wicked, especially when they are persons of rank, or protected by men in power, rejects Jesus, and prefers Barabbas. If we are guilty of this dreadful sin, the consequence of it will be, that we shall be rejected by Christ in our turn, when he cometh in the glory of his Father at the last day.

5. The disciples of Christ are not to expect better treatment from the world, than what their Lord and master met with. As the whole multitude cried out, Away with him, give us Barabbas; so likewise they cried out against St. Paul, Away with him! (Acts xxi. 36.) and the same outcry was repeated numberless times afterwards against the primitive Christians; Away, said their persecutors, with these Atheists! And this was, because they would not acknowledge the idols of the heathens to be gods,

How often is the name of the Saints traduced as evil? But Christ says, 'Blessed are ye when men shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.' We are not therefore to take offence when this happens to other faithful servants of God; nor are we to think it strange, when we see every thing dark and tempestuous about us, and when the world cries out, that we are not worthy to live. Happy are we when this comes upon us for Christ's sake! for it is infinitely better to be rejected by the world in fellowship with Christ than to enjoy the esteem, love, and applause of the world for a season, and afterwards to hear these dreadful words proceed from the mouth of our Redeemer and Judge, 'Depart from me, ye that work iniquity,' (Matth. vii. 23.)

THE PRAYER.

We also thank thee, O gracious Saviour, for this part of thy sufferings which we have now considered. Grant that our hearts may be mollified and changed by such considerations; may be filled with hatred against sin, and excited to a cordial love of thee. Preserve us from impiously rejecting thee, and from preferring the service of satan to the fellowship of thy sufferings. Give us we beseech thee, henceforth by thy spirit, the will and ability constantly to reject the evil and choose the good, to bear thy reproach, to take upon us thy cross, and willingly to submit to be rejected with thee by the world, that we may be acknowledged by thee before the Father and his holy angels. Grant this for the sake of thy meritorious sufferings. Amen.

CONSIDERATION XI.

PILATE'S FRUITLESS ENDEAVOURS TO RELEASE THE LORD JESUS.

'PILATE therefore, willing to release Jesus, saith again unto them, What will ye then that I shall

do with Jesus, who is called Christ, and whom ye call the King of the Jews? And they all cried out, Crucify him! Crucify him! And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go. But they cried out the more exceedingly, Let him be crucified! And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified: And the voices of them and of the chief Priests prevailed. And so Pilate, willing to content the people, gave sentence that it should be as they required. And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder had been cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus unto their will.' (Matt. xxvii. 22, 23. Mark xv. 12—15. Luke xxiii. 20—25.

In the last Consideration, we have observed that the Lord Jesus was placed on the same footing with Barabbas, a rebel and murderer, and offered to the choice of people; who, by the instigation of the chief Priests, rejected Jesus, and demanded with a tumultuous clamour that the murderer should be released. In these words we have a further accouut of Pilate's fruitless endeavours to release the Lord Jesus. Herein is mentioned,

First, Pilate's intention.

Secondly, His fruitless endeavours for putting his design in execution.

I. Pilate's intention is intimated by St. Luke in these words: 'Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus,' (Luke xxiii. 22.) It would have been more agreeable to Pilate, if the people by their own choice had declared for Jesus; for he was not only in his own mind convinced of our Saviour's innocence, but likewise had been warned by his wife to have nothing to do with that just man, nor offer the least injury to his person. But when, contrary to his expectation, and all probability, the repeated cry of the whole multitude was, 'Away with this man, and release unto us

Barabbas,' he still, for a time, adhered to his first purpose of endeavouring to procure Jesus's discharge.

If he had been truly in earnest in his design, he would have proceeded according to the laws, and made use of his juridicial power; and by that means, according to all human appearance, would soon have accomplished his desire. For he afterwards boasts of his authority, when he says to Jesus, 'Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee, (John xix. 10.) But Pilate was wavering and irresolute. He was unwilling to condemn an innocent person; but, at the same time, he was for keeping in with the accusers of this innocent man, that he might not draw their resentment on himself. Thus his mind fluctuated, without immediately determining any thing; so that he himself, as it were, stood in the way, and obstructed the execution of his own purpose. For he tranferred the juridical power, which he had to acquit Jesus, into the hands of the people; and so far betrayed the cause of innocence and justice, as to leave it to the option of the tumultuous populace, whether they would have the innocent Jesus released, or Barabbas, who was a rebel and murderer. Thus Pilate himself in a manner tied his own hands, and curtailed his power of administering justice.

Pilate, in this behaviour, is a true representative of those men, who have abundance of good intentions; but their wills are so ensnared by the allurements of sin, that they never can resolve to put them in execution. They design to leave off this and the other vice; they promise that for the future they will abstain from those mean vices of cursing, swearing, and lying; they will no longer talk obscenely; they will abstain from intemperate drinking; they will avoid bad company, and endeavour to amend in every respect. But alas! these good resolutions are never put in practice. For they will not make use of the proper means to effect their designs. They will not

avoid the occasions of sinning; they will not engage in earnest supplications to God; they will not pray to him for a contrite and new heart; they will not do violence to their wicked inclinations and fleshly lusts; but they leave these things to come spontaneously, without using their own endeavours. Thus, notwithstanding all their good intentions, they continue slaves to sin and satan. Nay, they have so little modesty, that they set themselves on a level with St. Paul in this particular, and say, in these words, 'To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not,' (Rom. vii. 18.) But they never think on another passage in that Apostle's writings, wherein he says, 'I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me,' (Phil. iv. 15.) When such irresolute sinners have thus gone on for a considerable time in forming good designs, in praying, now and then lamenting their wretched case, and making some faint struggles against sin, and do not meet with the desired success they will alter their tone, and say, 'I fain would reform my life; but I cannot compass it.' At last they proceed so far as to throw the blame of their impenitence on God, and to accuse their Creator; impiously alleging, that he will not assist their endeavours, and how willing soever they are to be converted, God will not vouchsafe to give them sufficient grace.

Let every one who reads this seriously examine himself, and see whether he has hitherto been of such a perverse disposition.

Jesus Christ was also to suffer by this wicked depravity of the human will, that he might also expiate this sin. Therefore whoever is conscious that he is guilty of it, let him sincerely repent, and humbly take refuge in the sufferings of Christ; and pray to God to give him a firm resolution of amendment, and assist him in the execution of it: Otherwise, notwithstanding his good intentions, his portion will be with the workers of iniquity; and Solomon's words will

be verified in him, 'The desire of the slothful killeth; for his hands refuse to labour,' (Prov. xxi. 25.) Such was Pilate's intention for releasing the Lord Jesus.

II. In the next place, we are to consider his fruitless endeavours for putting his design in execution. In the above harmonised account we may observe the following particulars.

First, How Pilate opposed the Jews, and as it were contested with them about releasing Jesus.

Secondly, The instruments by which the Jews got the better of Pilate.

Thirdly, How at length, after an ineffectual resistance, he yielded to their will.

First, Pilate opposed the Jews, and as it were contested with them about releasing the blessed Jesus. This was done by a two-fold question, which he put to the people.

As to the first question, we find that Pilate, in order to shew his willingness to release Jesus, said again unto them, 'What will ye that I shall do with Jesus who is called Christ, and whom ye call the King of the Jews?' He no longer troubled himself about Barabbas, having before referred it to the people's choice, whether they would have Barabbas or Jesus released; so that he was now, as it were, entangled in his own toils. But what gave him most uneasiness at present was, how to dispose of Jesus of Nazareth, whom he was desirous also to discharge. He therefore asks the people, What they would have him do with this man? In this question Pilate shews both his artifice, and the wickedness of his heart.

His artifice or worldly cunning appears by his putting it in the power of the Jewish people to release Jesus also; and thus he enlarges their privileges, which they so highly valued. For he seems not unwilling to permit them to release two instead of one at the Passover, if they would but give him the *least intimation* of their assent. He imagined that the

Jews, who were so tenacious of their privileges, would have eagerly embraced this opportunity of enlarging them by interceding for the discharge of Jesus of Nazareth, who was more deserving of it than Barabbas. It was also a finesse in him, that, in his address to the Jews, he mentioned Jesus by such titles as tended to prejudice the minds of the people in his favour. He stiles him Christ, and King of the Jews. As if he had said, "You have for a long time expected a Messiah. Now as I understand, that this man is held to be that person by a great number of the Jews, it would become you to shew him more love and esteem. You accuse him of giving himself out to be the King of the Jews; and I am informed, that the other day, at his entry into Jerusalem, you publicly proclaimed him to be a king. Consider therefore, that it will little redound to your honour to suffer your king to be crucified as a slave." So far there was a great deal of artifice and cunning in this question.

But this artifice was intermixed with wickedness and malice. For, in the first place, it ill becomes a judge to ask the people, what he shall do with a prisoner: He ought to be guided by the laws, according to which he should proceed in punishing criminals. In the next place, he redicules both our Saviour's prophetic office of Messiah, and his regal dignity; for he himself did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah and King of the Jews, and yet he makes use of this as the means of promoting his release. Hence Pilate's meaning seems to be this: If you do not regard Jesus as an innocent man, yet you ought to shew a reward to your own honour and reputation; for every one will be apt to think it strange, that you have consented to have this person crucified, whom by your acclamations you had so lately proclaimed King of Israel. Now reflect, what all people of any sense or honour will think of such an inconsistent conduct. But it appeared by the event what little

effect such representations had on an inflamed, outrageous multitude: For when the question was put, 'What shall I do with Jesus?' all the people immediately cried out with one voice, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!'

Hereupon Pilate puts another question to the people, *viz.* 'Why, what evil hath he done?'

1. Pilate again bears witness to the innocence of Jesus, both interrogatively and affirmatively, in these words: 'What evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him.' As if he had said, It is not a sufficient reason for me to order Jesus to be crucified, that you cry out in the face of open day, Crucify him! Crucify him! He must have been found guilty of some enormous crime, deserving of such an infamous and painful death. Now I have not found any such crime in the man; and you yourselves have not been able to prove him guilty. If you have any thing of weight to urge, speak out; I am ready to enter on a fresh examination, and for this reason I ask you, 'What evil hath he done?' For as to what has hitherto been alleged against him, that does not at all amount to a capital crime. Thus Pilate a third time delivers his testimony of the innocence of Christ. Upon this,

2. He proposes a medium, by way of expedient to put an end to the affair: 'I will therefore chastise him, and let him go.' Thus he intended to keep the middle way in this critical situation. His conscience loudly protested against putting Jesus to death; yet, in order to appease the tumultuous rage of the Jews, he was for giving them some satisfaction; and to this end, he proposed the barbarous expedient of scourging him after the Roman manner. But how unjust this proceeding was, has been already shewn in the ninth Consideration. This was the method Pilate took to silence the people who demanded that Jesus should be crucified.

We find in this behaviour of Pilate some things worthy of our imitation, and some things which we are to avoid.

In his repeated remonstrances to the people, in order to preserve the life of the innocent Jesus, he is a pattern to us, who should thus stand up in behalf of God's injured honour, and the welfare of our neighbour. We should spare no pains, avoid no labour; but risk all the storms which malice can raise against us, when engaged in so good a cause. Pilate's question, 'What evil hath he done?' is likewise commendable, and worthy of imitation; and is frequently heard among Christians. If this question was put on proper occasions, many persons wrongfully defamed would be vindicated and comforted; the mouth of malice would be stopped, infamous calumnies discouraged, and so many scandalous falsities against good men would no longer go current. But if, on the other hand, we only ask what ill is said of a person, in order to defame him, good men will still suffer the lash of calumny; venomous tongues will wonton in an unbounded licentiousness, and audaciously spread the worst reports of the best men. But if a man is so far prejudiced against the innocent as to agree to that absurd maxim. That he of whom evil is spoken, must be in some measure guilty, it is the very triumph of the spirit of lies. Let it rather be our equitable and generous resolution, always to obviate calumny in this manner, "You, who speak evil of your neighbour, ought to go to him, and before his face prove unanswerably what evil he has done."

But though Pilate on this occasion did something which may shame many Christians, and serve for their imitation; yet is he not to be approved or imitated in other particulars. He only opposed the rage of the multitude against the innocent Jesus with words, without making use of the power, which God had put into his hands, for quelling the tumult. No more, indeed, is to be expected from him whose

power does not extend beyond fair words; but from a person invested with sufficient power and authority, it is justly required that he should go farther in the protection of innocence. From this behaviour of Pilate we may learn the following truths:

1. God has imprinted on the conscience of man such an abhorrence of manifest injustice, that it often makes a long resistance before it gives itself up to commit injustice.

Our conscience is certainly corrupted by the fall, and the abhorrence of evil, which was at first infused into us by our Creator, extremely weakened; yet natural conscience frequently holds out a long time, before it suffers itself entirely to be overcome by, and brought under the yoke of sin. Of this we have an instance in Pilate. He defends himself with questions and protestations, rather than consent to this iniquitous proceeding, or surrender himself a slave to wickedness and sin. His conscience is strongly impressed with the idea of the injustice of putting an innocent man to death. And since he was convinced of our blessed Saviour's innocence, he could not immediately bring himself to put him to death, and thus act contrary to the fundamental truths which were engraven on his conscience.

This innate power of conscience many who read this, it may be presumed, have experienced. A man when first seduced to commit a sin, from which he had always abstained before, generally feels in his conscience the most violent emotions, and reluctance against it. But by custom of sinning, his conscience becomes enured to sin, and his former abhorrence of evil gradually wears off. Hence every one may judge of the state of his own conscience, by attending to the faintness or vigour of its motions, when he is about to commit any sin. Let us therefore treat our consciences with the greatest tenderness: and let us by no means endeavour to quench that abhorrence of evil which is naturally imprinted on the human mind;

since, by opposing this divine principle within us, we act in opposition to God himself. This is the greatest injury a man can do to his own soul; for it is the most certain way to incur the dreadful judgment of an obdurate insensibility.

2. The more opposition a man has met with in committing any heinous sin, either from his own conscience or from others, the greater is the guilt he incurs by sinning.

The chief Priests and Elders of the people had many difficulties to grapple with, before they compassed their wicked ends. Pilate, for a long time, opposed their unjust desires; and it must have cost them no small pains, before they could bring over the people to vote as they directed them. But this highly aggravated their sin; and consequently increased their guilt. This circumstance is likewise observed by St. Peter, who says to the Jews. 'Ye denied Jesus in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go: Ye denied the holy One, and the just, and desired a murderer to be granted to you.' (Acts iii. 13, 14.) St. Luke also carefully enumerates the impediments which God threw in the way of the Jews to divert them from this horrid injustice, in these words: 'And Pilate said a third time, Why, what evil hath he done?' (Luke xxiii. 23.) Thus all the obstructions, which God lays in a sinner's way to prevent the perpetration of any crime, are registered in God's book of remembrance, and there charged to his account. God often meets those persons who have purposed in their minds to commit a sin, as formerly the angel of the Lord met Balaam, with a flaming sword, with dreadful threatenings and agonies of mind. He causes every thing to obstruct them, and gives them not only warnings and smitings of conscience; but throws in their way many obstacles to the accomplishment of their wicked purposes, and such as they cannot overcome without great strugglings. When a man, notwithstand-

ing all these obstacles, breaks the chains by which God would have restrained him, and, like a headstrong horse, throws off the reins with which God would have kept him in the right way, it is a guilt of the deepest die. It behoves every one, therefore, to examine himself in this point, whether he has thus sinned against God, and his gracious warnings and powerful calls against sin. If we have been guilty of such inattention and wickedness, let us fly to Jesus as our asylum, who had suffered under such circumstances, that these heinous offences might be forgiven to the truly penitent.

3. Many persons, to this day, are at a loss what to do with Jesus, *i. e.* they know not in what light to look upon the Mediator of the New covenant. Some impiously make Christ a promoter of sin who has shed his precious blood, and acquired such infinite merit, in order to procure for them from God the privilege of continuing in sin, without any fear of punishment. But such presumptuous persons may be well assured, that they are most wretchedly deceived. The blessed Jesus will never suffer himself to be considered in such a light with impunity; for it is contrary to the great end and design of his mission.

Even penitent believers often do not rightly understand, in what light they are to look on Christ before the Divine tribunal. They look upon him very differently from what he is represented to them in the gospel. They are often afraid of him as a rigid legislator and merciless judge, imposing grievous burdens on them, and rigorously executing the sentence of death against them. Whereas on the contrary, he is mildness and benignity itself; and promises rest to all those who travail and are heavy laden, if they come unto him.

Secondly, Let us consider the instrument by which the Jews got the better of Pilate; and this was a tumultuous outcry of the multitude, which was assembled about his house.

To Pilate's first question, namely, 'What shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?' he receives for answer, 'Crucify him.' They now tell him particularly, and without any hesitation, what he should do with Christ. Before they had only cried out in general terms, 'Away with him;' but now they specify what death he should die, and desire that the punishment which Barabbas deserved, as a rebel and murderer, should be inflicted on Jesus, and that he should be crucified instead of that malefactor. In this cry the people unanimously join. When Pilate said therefore, 'What shall I then do with Jesus?' they answered 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' and by repeating the words twice, they shewed their eagerness and tumultuous impatience, and that they thirsted after our Saviour's blood.

In answer to Pilate's second question, *viz.* 'What evil hath he done?' they cannot produce a single fault of which they can accuse him with any appearance of truth: so that they have nothing to urge, but only to repeat a senseless clamour, Crucify him! Crucify him! The medium, which Pilate had proposed of chastising Jesus and letting him go, they take no notice of; but insist on his being put to death by crucifixion. Whatever unsteadiness Pilate might shew on this occasion, the Jews unmoveably persisted in their bloody purpose, and would by no means be dissuaded from it. Thus this tumultuous outcry grew to such a head, that St. Luke (Luke xxiii. 23.) can scarce find words to express the impetuosity of it. He says, in the first place, 'They were instant with loud voices.' By this he gives us to understand, that as the judge, instead of the firmness becoming his office, began to waver and give way to their clamours, so they became more bold and urgent in their demands; and since they had no proofs to adduce of our Saviour's guilt, they made up that deficiency with the vehemence of their voices. After this, the Evangelist adds, 'requiring that he might be cruci-

fied.' They now no longer made use of a submissive request to obtain their ends, but assumed to themselves the authority of dictating to the governor, and peremptorily insisted on his compliance with their demands. In the last place, St. Luke says, 'and the voices of them and of the chief Priests prevailed.' Hence it appears, that the hoary Chiefs of the Jewish people likewise cried out as loud as their feeble age would permit, and that they were not ashamed to join in one tumultuous cry with the rude populace, of whom, upon another occasion, they contemptuously said, 'This people who knoweth not the law, are cursed,' (John vii. 49.) Thus the voices of the people and of the chief Priests were here combined together, and became so vehement and importunate, that they prevailed over Pilate's irresolution and timorousness. Here likewise was fulfilled the prophecy in the Psalms, (Psalm xxii. 13.) where the Messiah complains of this outrageous multitude in these words: 'they gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.' We shall here make the following observation:

Sin is of such a savage nature, that the more it is indulged and yielded to, the more violent it rages.

The more Pilate represented to his enemies the innocence of the blessed Jesus, and the more he expostulated with them, the more vehemently did they cry out in a rage, Crucify him! Crucify him! Even the most cautious and prudent people are often thrown into a kind of phrenzy, when they have once drank of the intoxicating cup of satan. Such a troubled sea is the heart of man; that when it is once set in a violent agitation, it usually throws up its own filth and shame. How should it humble every one of us to think, that he bears in his bosom the latent seeds of his abomination. If any one has not been unhappily carried to such excess, it is not owing merely to his own caution and prudence, but to the grace of God, who has hitherto kept from him such occasions

as would have stirred up this fury within him. But on this holy person the power of sin failed; here it met with a more powerful restraint. 'Hitherto, said the divine justice, shall thou come and no farther; here shall thy proud waves be stayed.' Sin shall now no longer tyrannize over thee, O man, if thou continuest in the grace of God and fellowship of Christ and buildest thine house on this immoveable rock.

Thirdly, and lastly, mention is here made, how Pilate at length, after an ineffectual resistance, yields to the will of the people, when he heard their clamours and tumultuous outcries continually increasing. Pilate concluded, that nothing was to be done with the enraged multitude, and that it was better to give way to their violence, lest, if their fury should break out into an open insurrection, they should assault his house, and murder him and his family. He therefore resolved to content the people, and to act as they desired him. To this end, he not only complied with their demand, by pronouncing a judicial sentence that Jesus, at the desire of the people, should be crucified; but also discharged the murderer Barabbas, whom they probably congratulated on his narrow escape, and received into the Synagogue as one of their society. Hence we shall deduce the following truths.

1. When the natural man begins to slip down the precipice of sin, his own strength is not sufficient to recover him.

When Pilate once departed from the plain path of justice, and had recourse to schemes and artifice, he fell into such a slippery way, that he could not recover himself. When once he began to capitulate with the people, and to yield to them, hoping that they in return might meet him half way, satan pressed him so close, by means of the tumultuous populace, that he threw him to the ground, and triumphed over his faint strugglings. It is the same still with all presumptuous men, however they may persuade themselves, that, notwithstanding the many oppor-

tunities of sinning that occur to them, they will be careful to keep within bounds, and at a proper time clear themselves with honour. Happy is the man who, acting more wisely, withstands the first assaults of sin, and avoids the opportunities of falling. Let no one rely too much on his good dispositions, his natural strength, or the abhorrence he may have for some particular sin. A violent temptation soon overcomes nature, which, with all its boasted strength, is not able to withstand its efforts. Satan is a subtle enemy, and by the fear of man, the hope of favour and applause, or upon the urgent demands of the people, he strikes a damp on the best inclinations. This, Pilate unhappily experienced; and the only way to come off conqueror is, to apply for assistance from above.

2. The condemnation of the Lord Jesus, and the releasing of Barabbas, as a type of our freedom and release, by the condemnation of Christ.

Barabbas, as it were, represents the first Adam and his whole sinful progeny. As this Barabbas was a rebel, so likewise was Adam; and in him all mankind were guilty of rebellion against God. As Barabbas was a murderer, so Adam, as it were, murdered all his posterity, by subjecting them to the sentence of temporal and eternal death. As Barabbas had hitherto lain in bonds and chains; so the whole human race naturally lies captive under the power of satan, and bound with the chains of sin. Moreover, on Adam and all his posterity was this sentence denounced, and was to have been executed, 'On the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die;' and this was not only a temporal, but an eternal death. But as Barabbas is here, as it were, exchanged for Jesus; as the former is set at liberty, and the latter crucified; so is the first Adam with all his descendants exchanged for the second Adam, who stood in their stead. He is sentenced to death; and they are discharged. This is the incomprehensible mystery of

Divine love, in which justice and mercy have kissed each other, and joined in the most amiable harmony. Justice is satisfied; since the sentence of death which it had pronounced is executed, though not on the sinner, but on the surety. Mercy may receive the sinner into favour, and set him at liberty; since the surety permitted the sentence of death to be vicariously executed on himself. O miracle of love, which it becomes us humbly to admire, and gratefully to adore! How can we sufficiently praise our merciful Saviour, for thus standing as a victim in our stead, and submitting to be sentenced to death, against the hideous outcries of an outrageous multitude!

But let us be very careful that we do not act over again this tragedy, which the impious Jews acted here. We have within us a Barabbas, namely, the old man, who is a rebel against the Divine Majesty, and a transgressor of his commands, and consequently deserves to be crucified. Far be it from us, that by suffering him to live, we should crucify the Son of God afresh by our sins. Far be it from us, to fulfil the wicked lusts of the flesh, and to suppress the good motions of the Holy Spirit. Far be it from us, by continuance in sin, to spare the old, and do violence to the new man. Lastly, far be it from us to deliver a criminal, out of an abject fear of, or complaisance to man, and to injure a true member and faithful servant of Christ. May the Lord of all mercy ever preserve us from treading in these footsteps of Pilate and the Jews! Amen.

THE PRAYER.

O FAITHFUL and ever-living Saviour! blessed be thy holy name for thy goodness in standing as a victim in our stead, and submitting to be condemned to die, that we might be happily acquitted We adore this thy stupendous love, and humbly beseech thee to make us partakers of all the salutary fruits of it. Make a deep and lasting impression in our minds of

this astonishing exchange, and thereby powerfully unite us the more cordially to love thee, the great purchaser of our freedom, and to order our whole lives according to thy good pleasure May we on the other hand, by godly sorrow and repentance, mortify our old man as already condemned in thy condemnation; and so deprive him of all his power, that he may never recover his dominion over us, but that thy holy spirit may live and dwell in us. Thus for the great travail of thy soul, which thou didst undergo for our sake, thou mayest have pleasure in us as thy redeemed, and receive us into the mansions of bliss and glory. Amen.

CONSIDERATION XII.

THE INDIGNITIES WHICH THE LORD JESUS SUFFERED IN PILATE'S JUDGMENT-HALL.

'THEN Pilate therefore took Jesus and scourged him. And the soldiers of the governor led Jesus away into the common-hall, and they called together the whole band. And they stripped him, and clothed him in a purple robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it about his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they mocked him, and began to salute him, saying hail king of the Jews! And they did spit upon him, and took the reed and smote him on the head, and bowing the knee, worshipped him: And they smote him with their hands,' (Matt. xxvii. 27, 30. Mark xv. 16—19. John xix. 1, 2, 3.)

In these words we have an account of the shocking indignities, which the Lord Jesus suffered in Pilate's judgment-hall.

Hitherto our blessed Saviour, had been since in the governor's house, was free from any rude insults. Pilate had zealously laboured to deliver him out of the hands of his blood-thirsty enemies. He had

successively given them several testimonies of his innocence by repeated declarations; and though he had proposed to chastise Jesus and then let him go, no violence had as yet been offered to him. But a more cruel, bloody, and moving scene now presents itself, where the Son of God, as he himself had foretold, is delivered up into the hands of sinners, and left to the discretion of the savage and merciless soldiers. Let us therefore, with an attentive and sorrowful mind, consider these base indignities offered to the Lord of Glory. Let us see what good effect the consideration of these execrable doings will produce in a soul, possessed with a real love and affection for his crucified Saviour.

These indignities, which our blessed Lord here endured, may be considered in three different lights.

First, As they were painful.

Secondly, As they were ludicrous.

Thirdly, As they shewed the utmost contempt.

I. The painful indignities which our Saviour endured, were, the scourging, the crowning him with thorns, and the rude blows of the soldiers.

The scourging is thus described by St. John (John xix. 1.), 'Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him.' He had before said to the Jews, 'Take ye him, and judge him according to your law (Chap. xviii. 31.);' but as the Jews had declined this, it is afterwards said, 'Then Pilate took Jesus.'

Alas! Pilate would never have taken away our Redeemer, had it not been for our sins, and that inexpressible love which his heavenly Father bore to the human race, who sent him down from his own bosom; for 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, and delivered him up for us all,' (John iii. 16. Rom. viii. 32.) One is here taken as a ransom for all; and suffers death, that all the rest may be pardoned.

Thanks be to thee, O heavenly Father, who, for my salvation, hast sent thy beloved Son, and given

him up to be reviled, insulted and put to death! Thanks be to thee, O Son of the Father, who didst permit thyself to be led away, which, by the least exertion of thy Almighty power, thou couldest have easily prevented. O thou most precious gift of heaven! preserve me, that I may never treat thee with such levity and contempt as Pilate did; but rather that in humble faith and pure love, I may stretch out my hand and lay hold on thee as my salvation. Grant also that all, who have laid hold of thee in true faith, may diligently keep thy commandments, and walk worthy of thy gospel, (Col. ii. 6.)

When Pilate had taken our blessed Saviour, and carried him into his Judgment-hall, the Evangelists tell us that he scourged him. It is not to be supposed, that Pilate scourged Jesus with his own hands, since this would have been an action much beneath his dignity. He only ordered the soldiers to scourge him; for what one person causes to be done by another, is justly imputed to him that commands it, as if he himself had done it (Acts ii. 23. iii. 15. xxi. 24, 25.) Let all those who seduce others to sin, and either by their command, advice, or evil example, promote wicked and unjust proceedings, take notice of this; and be well assured, that every act of injustice, every sin which has been committed by their persuasion or authority, shall be placed to their account, and that they shall one day be punished for those sins by the righteous Judge of all flesh.

But the Lord Jesus was not only beaten with rods, which was reckoned the least ignominious by the Romans; but with thongs or cords, a punishment peculiar to the meanest slaves; especially those who were sentenced to be crucified. For this end, the criminal was not laid on the ground, and stretched out as among the Jews (Deut. xxv. 2.) but he stood with his hands bound, and fastened to a post or pillar; so that both the breast and back were exposed. Then the soldiers appointed to execute this punishment

usually scourged him on the naked back with thongs, to the ends of which pieces of iron-wire were sometimes tacked.

God had expressly ordered the Jews (Deut. xxv. 3.) that they should not give a malefactor more than forty stripes; but among the Romans, the number of stripes was not limited, but given according to the crime of which the malefactor had been guilty, and the discretion of the judge. It is not to be doubted, but that these cruel and impious soldiers now inflicted this punishment with the utmost severity; for they had no orders to spare the sacred body of the Lord Jesus. On the contrary, Pilate by thus scourging our blessed Lord, which usually preceded crucifixion, might possibly direct that Jesus should be severely scourged, with this view, viz. that the sight of his lacerated body, covered with sanguine torrents, might move the hard hearted Jews to pity the prisoner, and to desist from their obstinacy in opposing his releasement. Hence it may be easily conceived, with what inhuman fury this scourging was executed. The soldiers probably had their thongs interwoven with iron-wire so that they not only fetched blood, but even tore the flesh from the bones. This appears the more probable, as our blessed Saviour was so infeebled by this scourging, that afterwards he had not strength enough to drag his cross to the place of execution.

Thus, O my Saviour, thine own prophecy, namely, 'They shall scourge the man,' (Luke xviii, 32.) was fulfilled and written in letters of blood on thy sacred back. Thus was accomplished what thou didst foretel by the mouth of the prophet, namely, 'I gave my back to the smiters,' (Isaiah l. 6.) But, O blessed Redeemer, why must Thou thus present thy sacred back? It was I that have turned my back on my Creator, and consequently was to have received these stripes; it was I that deserved to have felt the scourge of the Divine wrath to all eternity. But thou, O merciful Son of the Father, didst stand in the stead

of thy guilty servant, and receivest the strokes which were due to my sins. Praised be thy name for every stripe thou didst receive; every drop of thy sacred blood, which was thus barbarously shed by the inhuman soldiers! But this thy heavenly Father has appointed to be the healing balsam for the wounds of my conscience. Whenever I am tempted to sin, let me think on these sufferings, and let mine eyes run down with penetential tears. And though thou dost not require that I should scourge and lacerate my body, as a punishment for my sins; yet enable me, that, according to thy precepts, I may by repentance daily crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, break its stubborn will and mortify its deeds. But if, in following thee I should be honoured with stripes for thy name sake, enable me to receive the strokes with the same joy as thine Apostles did (Acts v. 41.) May our souls be healed by thy meritorious stripes, (Pet. ii. 24.)

The second painful insult offered to the Son of God, was the crowning him with thorns. The rage and cruelty of the soldiers was not satisfied by the bloody furrows, which they had plowed on our Saviour's back. They do not spare his sacred head, but make a wreath of thorns, and press it on his head, so that the prickles were forced into his temples among the veins with which those parts abound, and the blood ran down his face in purple streams.

Here a faithful soul may say, Fresh fountains of blood are opened to wash away the stains and pollutions, which I have contracted. It was the order of my Creator, that, after the Fall, the ground should bring forth thorns and thistles, as a token of the curse. Here therefore, I now see him who is crowned with thorns as it were clothed in my curse, to procure me the blessing. Here I see the ram that was to be offered in my stead, as it were, caught in a thicket (Gen. xxii. 13.) Alas! the wild uncultivated soil of my heart naturally bears nothing but thorns and this-

ties. O my Saviour! how many seeds of thy divine truths have been choaked with the thorns of worldly solicitudes, which I have suffered to take root in my soul, so that they could not grow up to bear fruit in due season. As thy head was here stuck with thorns, so would my soul have been incessantly tortured with the goads of an evil conscience, and torn, as it were with thorns and briars (Judges viii. 7, 16.) How amazing is thy love, O my Saviour! When a regal crown was offered thee by the Jewish people, thou didst fly from it; but thou didst willingly bow thy sacred head under a crown of thorns, hereby confirming the testimony that thou hast given, that thy kingdom is not of this world.

The third painful indignity which our blessed Saviour endured was likewise from the soldiers, whose frequent blows bruised his sacred face and head, and drove the thorns deeper into his temples; so that it would have been no wonder, if under such inexpressible pains, embittered by insult, he had fainted away. This must naturally have been the case, had not the divinity within him supported him, and reserved him for still greater tortures.

O my Saviour, these insulting blows were to have fallen on me. It was I that should have been eternally under the buffetings of Satan; but thou, my blessed representative, didst take them on thee, and sufferedst thyself to be beaten, like a despisable slave. Alas! how can a poor worm be inflamed with anger at the least blow, and account it an affront which must be avenged by the blood of the offender? whereas thou, who art King of kings, and the Lord of glory, hast with the greatest patience and serenity suffered these repeated indignities. Thanks be to thee, O blessed Jesus, who by all these painful kinds of suffering didst sanctify my pains! if thou shouldest be pleased to afflict my body with painful sufferings, O impart to me that patience and resignation which thou didst shew on this occasion! Alas! I am ashamed

of my impatience and want of courage, when I consider how many martyrs, and many of them of the weaker sex, have for thy sake, undergone the acutest pains, and the most cruel tortures which infernal malice could invent, not only with patience, but even with joy and triumph. * Did these unresisting innocent sheep patiently suffer such inhuman barbarities for thy sake, O thou crucified Saviour, and am I so fond of myself, that I can scarce bear an insulting look or opprobrious name? O strengthen me with thy spirit, and arm me with thy courage, constancy, and patience, that I may be able, if called upon, to glorify thee by painful sufferings.

II We now proceed, in the next place, to consider the ludicrous indignities which were offered to the immaculate Lamb of God; and these mockeries consist partly in actions, and partly in words.

The ludicrous actions all tended to ridicule the Kingly office of the Lord Jesus. As his Prophetic office had been ridiculed in the house of Caiaphas, by blind-folding him, striking him with the palms of their hands, and then saying to him, Prophecy unto us, who is it that struck thee; so here in the house of the civil judge, his Regal office is mocked and ridiculed; and thus the good confession which he made of his kingdom before Pilate, and of which these scoffers had got some hint, was made matter of laughter, and insulting mirth.

* The Author here enumerates the variety of tortures which were afflicted on the primitive Martyrs; but as they resemble those refinements of cruelty which were lately practised in France on the wretched *Damien*, I have omitted them as too shocking to English readers, whose humanity will readily excuse me for drawing a veil over such a horrid scene. Whoever has a mind to see an account of these inhuman barbarities may consult KORTHOLT'S *Tractus de persecutione Eccl. primæva*, GALLONIOUS & SAGITTARIUS *De Cruciatibus Martyrum*, &c. *W.*

How sensibly must this prophane mockery have affected our blessed Saviour! If a pious Christian, who has a due esteem for the honour of God's word, is pierced to the heart when he hears divine truths abused by the ludicrous tongues of prophane scoffers; O how was the soul of the blessed Jesus pierced, at hearing these miscreants exercise their raillery on this sacred decree of his heavenly Father, 'I have set my King upon my holy hill of Sion,' and striving who could make the most ludicrous sarcasms on his glorious confession, that he was a King! Here we may observe two circumstances, which render this mockery of our blessed Lord the more criminal.

First, It was acted in the very hall of judgment, in the palace of the Imperial governor. It gives a keener edge to abuse and injustice, when it is offered in a place where one may naturally expect to find protection and succour. How must he, 'who loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity,' (Psalm xlv. 7.) be grieved to see a court of judgment which ought to be the asylum of persecuted righteousness, and oppressed innocence, changed into a theatre of prophane mockeries and brutal insolence?

Secondly, The whole cohort of the Roman soldiers, which consisted of several hundreds, was here got together; for we are informed, that they called together the whole band. The affronts, the vexation and sorrow which ten inhuman reprobates may cause to a good man, when they are left at liberty to use him at discretion, are inexpressible; how great then must have been the outrages committed by five or six hundred rude soldiers, instigated by the spirit of malice and cruelty! The Roman soldiers were generally the most abandoned among that people, and openly committed all sorts of crimes, without so much as the shadow of a natural modesty or virtue. They were trained up in their natural licentiousness, and immersed in all kinds of wickedness. Was this

pious Job grieved that he should be mocked by those whom he would have disdained to have set with the dogs of his flock? (Psalm xxx. i.) How must it have affected the blessed Jesus, to be given up to the outrages of such a swarm of riotous soldiers! Here the meek Lamb of God stood surrounded with ravening wolves. Here, for our sake, the only begotten Son of God was delivered into the hands of sinners.

O my Saviour, may a pious Christian say, thy love to mankind must have been infinite, which could bring thee to a resolution of undergoing such numberless abuses, and horrid outrages, for thy sake! Endless thanks be ascribed to thee for humbling thyself so low, that I might in due time be exalted.—Praised be thy name, for suffering thyself to be reviled and insulted by the very refuse of mankind, that I might be glorified with thy saints. Unfeigned thanks be to thee, for suffering thyself to be brought into the council of the ungodly, that I might be delivered from their company, and advanced to the assembly of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven. Make me also willing, through the knowledge of this thine inconceivable love, to submit for thy sake to abuse, and to be mocked and insulted for thy name, not only by my superiors, but even by the meanest of the people. Arm me with thy spirit of patience, when the undiscerning world insolently mocks that hidden glory which I have in thee, and treats me as a despised laughing-stock. Thou hast sanctified my reproach; grant therefore that I may bear it with joy, and infinitely prefer it to the sinful pleasures and honours of the world.

But let us particularly consider the several kinds of ludicrous indignities which the Lord Jesus endured.

1. The rude soldiers, instead of a golden crown, or a wreath of laurel or ivy, which generals and conquerors in those times used to wear, contemptuously

round his sacred temples with a crown of thorns; now this was not only extremely painful, as we have observed above, but likewise implied a most abusive mockery. For, by this thorny wreath, the soldiers ironically signified, that Christ had deserved no better by his extraordinary atchievements, &c.

2. They put on him a purple mantle, or a scarlet robe. Every common soldier among the Romans anciently wore a mantle or upper garment over his whole armour. But the colour of this robe, which according to St. Matthew was scarlet, and, according to St. Mark and St. John, purple, sufficiently shewed that it had belonged to none of the common soldiers, but to some general officer. Now purple, under which general name scarlet was also comprehended, was a colour used only by kings and persons of the highest distinction. Thus the soldiers intended a further insult on the kingly dignity of our blessed Saviour, by clothing him in an old cast-off robe that had belonged to some person of distinction, as Herod had before clothed him in a gorgeous robe.

3. Instead of a sceptre or truncheon, which the generals among the Romans also usually bore, they put a reed in his hand; to denote that his kingdom, which he boasted of before Pilate, and which St. Paul justly terms 'a kingdom which cannot be moved,' (Heb. xii. 28.) was a weak and unstable kingdom, and that for his subjects to expect any protection from him was to lean on a broken reed,' (Isa. xxxvi. 6.)

4. After the soldiers had thus dressed him up as a mock-king, they bow the knee before him, pretending to him homage, according to the custom of the Orientals, &c. when they approached sovereign princes.

These insulting mockeries were accompanied with ridiculing words and taunting reflections, which were likewise levelled at Christ's kingly dignity. For as the Romans used to say to their emperors, Hail Cesar; so these miscreants, with a ludicrous tone and

gesture, cried out, 'Hail King of the Jews!' a title which they had borrowed from Pilate, who, in his expostulations with their chief Priests and people, had often called Jesus the 'King of the Jews.'

Thanks be to thee my Saviour, may a pious Christian say, for suffering thy sacred head to be disgraced with a mock-crown of thorns, that my head might be adorned with the wreath of victory over sin, death, and the grave, and my temples surrounded with a crown of glory that fadeth not away!

Thanks be to thee for permitting thyself to be disguised in the mock pageantry of a purple robe, that I might be arrayed in the white robe of innocence, and be clothed with immortality.

Thanks be to thee, who didst permit a reed to be put into thy hand, instead of a sceptre of righteousness, which is the sceptre of thy kingdom, to denote that thou wilt not break the bruised reed that is committed to thy care, and wilt suffer no man to pluck it out of thy hand, (John x. 28.)

Thanks be to thee for suffering thyself to be mocked by an ironical salutation, and bowing of the knee! What they did in railing I will do out of a religious awe to the divine majesty. I throw myself prostrate at thy feet. I adore thy glorious majesty, to which every knee shall bow. I willingly do homage to thee, thou King of kings! I kiss thy righteous sceptre. Hail King of saints and Lord of Glory!

III. We come, in the last place, to consider the contemptuous indignities which were offered to our blessed Lord; and these were as follows:

1. They stripped the Lord of glory of his garments, and exposed his holy, pure, and undefiled body, the tabernacle of the Deity, naked before such an insolent and profligate rabble. For it was a custom among the Romans, previously to strip those who were to be scourged. Here, alas, was verified that mournful prophecy concerning the Messiah in the Psalms, (Psalm lxix. 20.) 'Reproach hath bro-

ken my heart, and I am full of heaviness: I looked for some to take pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none.'

When a pious Christian reflects on this, he cannot fail to give vent to his gratitude in these or the like words: Eternal thanks be ascribed to thee, O my Saviour, who did thus expiate the disgrace of my nakedness, and again obtain for me the robe of innocence which I had lost by the fall. Grant that I may not suffer thee to wander about naked in thy poor members, by refusing to clothe them when it is in my power to do it.

2. Another reproachful abuse was, that they spit in our Saviour's face. The same indignity had already been offered him in Caiphas's house, where some of the members of the Sanhedrim, after Jesus had declared himself to be the Son of God, had spit on him; and their wicked example had been immediately followed by the officers of the court. This was such a base insult as could scarce be exceeded. O how must the amiable benign countenance of the Lord Jesus have been disfigured with streaming blood, cruel bruises, and the nauseous spittle of this insolent rabble.

O my Redeemer, may a pious Christian here say, did it cost thee so many indignities to obtain for me the favour of lifting up my face before God, with confidence and joy? O thou express image of the father, thou corporeal representative of the invisible God, hast thou, for my sake, suffered that glorious face to be spit on, whose effulgence shone like the meridian sun on the mount of transfiguration? How shall I sufficiently adore thy stupendous love, and amazing condescension! May that face, which was then covered with shameful spitting, present itself to me in the hour of death; and do thou comfort and animate my soul at that dark crisis with the light of thy countenance. Let it be to me a pledge that, however my face may be fallen and disfigured in death,

on the day of resurrection it shall shine like the sun; and be made like to thy glorious face, which now beams forth heavenly radiance in the mansions of bliss. How then can I sufficiently praise thee for all the marks of thy love, patience, and long-suffering, which, for the atonement of my sins, and as a pattern for my imitation, thou didst shew under all these painful abuses, and contemptuous indignities!

THE PRAYER.

ETERNAL thanks and endless praise be to thee, O Lamb of God, who in obedience to thy heavenly Father, and out of thy unspeakable love to our souls, didst enter on such a series of sufferings, which we, at this distance of time, cannot contemplate without shuddering. How should we have behaved had we, in thy stead, been destined to endure such pains, such mockery, such insults, and abuses? How should we have opened our mouths, and poured forth invectives and threatenings? But thou didst stand like a Lamb, that openeth not his mouth. No threatenings or railings came from thy sacred lips. Every one was allowed to vent his malicious rage against thee, every one was allowed to insult and to strike thee; yet all the pains, all the insults and mockeries, thou didst patiently endure as from the hands of thy righteous Father. The outrageous waves of insults and indignities thou didst permit to pass over thy tranquil heart; being certain that the Father would deliver thee from this hour, would crown thee with praise and honour, and command every knee to bow at thy sacred name. Grant, O Lord, that this part of thy sufferings may not only occasion a mere transitory emotion in our minds, that will vanish at the first appearance of temptation; but that it may make an indeliable impression on our hearts. Bless this part of thy sufferings to all our souls. May it be a terror to the secure, the licentious, and impenitent, that they may hence learn what sin is, and how severely it has

been punished in thy sacred person. Let it be also a comfort to the humble, contrite, and troubled spirit, that it may in faith lay hold on the merits of these thy manifold sufferings, and be made willing to follow thee through reproach and insults. Grant this for the sake of thy love. Amen.

CONSIDERATION XIII.

A FARTHER ATTEMPT OF PILATE TO RELEASE CHRIST.

'PILATE therefore went forth again, and saith unto the Jews, Behold, I bring him forth unto you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man! When the chief Priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him! crucify him! Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him; for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God,' (John xix. 4—7.)

In these words we have an account of a new attempt made by Pilate to release the Lord Jesus. We shall

First, Consider the means he used to compass it.

Secondly, The effect produced by those means.

I. The means Pilate made use of were as follows.

First, He again gives testimony of the innocence of Jesus.

Secondly, He presents the Lord Jesus to the Jews in a very deplorable condition, in order to move their pity.

First, Pilate gave a repeated public testimony of our blessed Saviour's innocence. For this end, Pilate goes out of his hall of judgment; for it is said

above by the Evangelist, (verse 4.) 'Pilate therefore went forth again.' However, Pilate was very unsuccessful; for he moves from place to place, tries several expedients; and yet miscarries in every one of them. This is a Divine judgment, that those schemes which are planned in opposition to God's decrees, should prove abortive. On the other hand, the Psalmist tells us, that 'whatsoever the just man doeth shall prosper,' (Psalm i. 3.)

When Pilate was gone out of the hall, and had taken the blessed Jesus with him, he addressed the Jews in these words, 'Behold I bring him forth unto you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him.' Pilate had, indeed, before given orders that Barabbas should be released, and delivered Jesus to be crucified; being urged by the vehement outcries of the people. For that end, he had ordered our blessed Saviour to be cruelly scourged by the soldiers, according to the Roman custom, as a prelude to the execution. But his conscience still struggled against putting an innocent person to death; and he is for trying, whether Jesus might be released even after he had been scourged, without undergoing any farther punishment. Pilate therefore pretends that he had made use of the scourge, as a kind of torture, in order to extort from the prisoner a confession of his most secret practices; but assures the people, that after a most severe scourging, he can find no manner of fault in him.

Divine Providence certainly over-ruled this remarkable circumstance, and ordered that Pilate, after such an inhuman abuse of our blessed Saviour by the hands of his soldiers, should again make a public declaration of his innocence, the knowledge of which is to be looked on as the most important article in the history of our Saviour's passion. For by this means, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world is presented by Pilate to the priests of the Jewish people, in its spotless innocence, according to the law; so that,

before it is slain, they may themselves take a view of it, and see that it is without blemish.

But the heavenly Father never would have permitted his beloved Son to have been thus barbarously treated by the Roman soldiers, if no trespasses had been imputed to him. Though the eyes of the Roman judge were utterly incapable of seeing into this mystery; yet the holy spirit assures us (2 Cor. v. 21.) 'That God has made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin.' Hence Christ is likewise termed, 'the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.' (John i. 29). It was for our sins therefore, that the Son of the Most High was insulted and reviled, was crowned with thorns, buffeted and cruelly scourged. Though the civil judge could find no fault in him; yet, as our surety, was held guilty at the divine tribunal of all the crimes, which the whole race of mankind had ever committed. This was the motive which induced the supreme judge of the world to give this delegate judge the power of thus scourging his only Son, since all the sins of the world were now imputed to him.

Secondly, Pilate made use of another expedient to prevent the execution of our blessed Lord; and this was to present the blessed Jesus to the Jews in a very deplorable condition, in order to move their pity and compassion. Hitherto our blessed Saviour had been scourged and abused in the hall of judgment; but now Pilate again takes him out of the hall and presents him to the Jews. After he had endeavoured to gain over the people, by addressing himself to their ears by a public testimony of our Saviour's innocence, he now places the blessed Jesus before their eyes in the most deplorable condition, in hopes that such a moving spectacle might yet kindle in their cold, blood-thirsty hearts, some small spark of compassion. For this purpose, though he had before ordered the old purple robe to be put on the Lord Jesus, it was now probably hung over his shoulders in

such a loose manner when he presented him to the people, that they might see his mangled body, covered all over with blood, stripes, and bruises.

The Evangelists here mentions

1. The appearance which our blessed Saviour made, when he was brought forth before the people.

2. The words which Pilate spoke on the occasion.

1. The appearance which our blessed Lord made is described in these words: 'Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.' Thus it appears, that the wreath of thorns which had been pressed on his head by the insolent soldiers, and the old purple robe which had been hung about him by the way of ridicule, were not taken off: But the Lord Jesus was publicly brought forth to the people with these marks of contempt; and presented to them as a king, who had been sufficiently mortified and chastized, for his effectation of sovereignty.—Here were indeed verified these words of Isaiah: 'He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty, that we should desire him.' (Isaiah liii. 2.)

2. The words which Pilate spoke on this occasion were as follows: 'Behold the man!' As if he had said, see what a deplorable condition this unhappy man is in! Allowing that he has been guilty of some petty crimes, or has offended you; yet now has he been sufficiently punished for it. I think you may very well put up with such a bloody satisfaction, and, at least, spare his miserable life. Thus Pilate was for for moving the people to compassion, though he himself had acted an unjust and unmerciful part, by ordering an innocent person to be treated with such barbarity. We shall here make the following observations:

1. That the Saviour of the world was exhibited as a spectacle to his people, ought also to be considred as a part of his meritorious sufferings.

The Lord Jesus stood here full of pains and wounds, and seemed outwardly to be in so dreadful a condition, that he looked more like a despisable worm than a man. Hence the Messiah, in the Psalms, (Psalm xxii. 7, 8.) as it were contradicts these words of his judge, behold the man, saying, 'I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake their head.' But inwardly his soul was lifted up in continual prayers and ejaculations to his Father; before whom he here presented himself covered with blood and stripes, in order to move his paternal tenderness to a reconciliation with us. His afflicted soul cried out much louder to his heavenly Father, than Pilate did to the people, Behold the man! the man who suffers himself to be thus inhumanly treated for men; and has taken upon him the punishment which they deserved, that they may obtain thy pardon. Father, forgive them the debts which they have contracted, and in acquittance of them, accept of the blood which streams from my lacerated body! Here I stand, O my Father! proceed to discharge at me the keen arrows of thy displeasure: I am ready to present myself as the mark to be shot at. Is it thy pleasure that I should still suffer more? Righteous Father, I most willingly and from my heart submit, to bear all thy chastisements. Only speak the word, and whatever thou commandest, that will I do. These or such like thoughts employed our blessed Saviour's serene mind at this juncture. At the same time, his heart was full of filial confidence in his heavenly Father, being thoroughly persuaded that he would deliver him from this hour of ignominy and reproach; that he would exhalt him to the highest honour, and present him to be adored by all the heavenly host.

Behold, to what a low condition the Creator of all worlds was brought by our sins! It was on us his sinful creatures that the sentence should have been

executed, according to that of the Prophet: 'The men that have transgressed against me shall be an abhorring unto all flesh' (Isaiah lxvi. 24.) The Son of God, on the contrary, was here made an abhorring unto all flesh. Oh, what an abomination must sin be in the eyes of God, since it rendered the Son of God, manifested in the flesh, a laughing-stock and an abhorrence to the people!

But, at the same time, this affords an inexpressible comfort to the faithful servants of God, when in this afflictive circumstance they are made like unto the Son of God, the first born among many brethren, and can say with St. Paul, 'We are made a spectacle unto the world;' (1 Cor. iv. 9.) or, as the same Apostle says of the Hebrew Converts, (Heb. x. 33.) when 'they are made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions, and partly whilst they become companions of them that are so used.' For as the Lord of Glory was here ridiculed, and made a gazing-stock to his people, the like opprobrious honour is likewise to be the portion of his faithful followers. How often have the primitive martyrs been made use of as torches for the nocturnal spectacles of the Heathens; who wrapped them in paper or linen garments done over with rosin, pitch, and other combustibles, and then set them on fire and burnt them alive! How often were they exposed naked to crowds of insulting spectators, by whom they were mocked, abused, and reviled! How often at the public games, were they made to fight with wild beasts, &c. &c. Therefore it might well be said, 'Behold the man!' What an unspeakable comfort and encouragement must it have been to those suffering members of Christ, to reflect, that their glorious Head was also made a gazing-stock to the people. It has also been a common practice in the Popish persecutions, to expose the martyrs who suffered for the truth of the Gospel to the insulting populace in the most ridiculous dress, in order to move their laughter and contempt. Thus

when the blessed martyr John Huss was carried to be burnt, a paper crown painted all over with frightful figures of devils was put on his head; which, however, served to remind him of his Saviour's mock crown of thorns, and so far proved a comfort to him. All these various sufferings of the martyrs for the truth, the Lord Jesus sanctified, by thus becoming a gazing stock to the Jews.

2. No sight is so profitable to the eye of the soul, as that of the blessed Jesus thus covered with blood and stripes.

To the eyes of vain men, indeed, this is an image of disgust and horror. They see nothing in it which can give the least comfort to them. It is something extraordinary, if the contemplation of it raise in them some motions of a mere natural pity, which soon vanish away without leaving any impression on the mind. But when a pious Christian, through the medium of true faith, beholds his Mediator, as it were changed into a worm; he, like the diseased Israelites, who looked on the brazen serpent, is healed by the sight, and his whole heart is mollified and changed.

Thus the counsel of God was manifested in these words of Pilate, 'Behold the man!' For as in the whole history of the passion, we are to turn our eyes from the hands of men, and to look up to the decrees of God; so must we do in this particular. Pilate was now in the same case as Caiaphas the High Priest was, when he spoke those remarkable words mentioned by St John, (chap. xi. 51,) of which we have taken notice above. Therefore as the blessed Jesus here through Pilate's means, exposed himself covered with blood to his people, or rather to the whole world so likewise the words, 'Behold the man,' must be looked upon by us as if spoken by Christ himself.

Therefore, ye impenitent sinners, who still place your satisfaction and delight in sin, Behold the man! Do you observe how sin has caused your Redeemer

to be thus barbarously treated? Here you may see, as in a faithful mirror, how it will go with you, unless you sincerely forsake your sins, and believe in Christ. If you die in your sins; in such reproach and disgrace, crowned with thorns of the curse, and stigmatised with the marks of everlasting death, will ye one day be exposed before God and his elect angels. Behold, from this eternal ignominy will your Saviour deliver you, but on no other conditions than those of faith in him, sincere repentance and amendment of life. You must truly turn to God, acknowledging yourselves deserving of the greatest disgrace and reproach, and present yourselves before the throne of grace as wretched criminals, who are guilty of death. O neglect not this opportunity until Jesus, who now, as it were, stands before your eyes as a despised worm, shall seat himself on his judgment-seat, and pronounce sentence of eternal condemnation on those who have despised the merits of his blood! Therefore with eyes full of tears, and with looks of compassionate longing after mercy, Behold the man, whom your sins have thus barbarously treated! Pray to him, whom for your sake became as it were, a worm, and less than man, and implore his protection to deliver you from that ruin and depravity into which you are sunk, and to make you the sons of God and heirs of Glory.

Behold, ye covetous and merciless rich men, Behold the man, who is thus debased and poor, in order to make many rich; who is so emaciated that you may tell all his bones; who out of his generous love and boundless liberality, poured out his precious blood for your salvation.

Ye sons of pride and ambition, Behold the man, who is humbled so low; whose head is crowned with thorns, and whose body is exposed in a tattered purple robe, for your sins.

Ye wanton and lascivious, Behold the man, whose whole body was covered with blood, stripes, and

bruises. Behold, with what torture he was to satisfy the Divine Justice for your sensuality, voluptuousness, and the lusts of your pampered flesh.

Ye passionate and revengeful, Behold the man, who suffers whatever Heaven is pleased to lay upon him with astonishing patience, mildness, and serenity; who permits himself to be assaulted by the combined rage of a tumultuous populace, that he might atone for your violent emotions of anger and revenge, and obtain pardon and grace for you from his heavenly Father. Therefore, throw yourselves at the feet of this incarnate God; pour out your tears and complaints before him; and pray to him that his sufferings may be for the salvation of your souls.

Lastly, Ye penitent and faithful souls, Behold the man! See how low his unspeakable love to you brought him! Turn your eyes from your sins and iniquities, with which your conscience is oppressed, and direct them to this Lamb of God the sacred victim that has borne your sins, and presented himself to the Divine Justice as a great sacrifice of atonement. Contemplate his whole deplorable appearance, by which he has removed the ghastly appearance of your guilt, when you were an abhorrence in the sight of God and in your own eyes, and has made you acceptable to the Father. Reflect on his ignominous crown of thorns, by which he has acquired for you a right to a never-fading crown of glory. Consider his mean purple robe, by which he has obtained for you the garment of innocence and righteousness. Contemplate his wounds and stripes as the remedy for the wounds of your conscience. Behold his face covered with blood, but at the same time beaming forth looks of the most tender love to your souls. Lastly, consider his composed and placid heart, which, amidst all his pains and the malicious outrages of his enemies, was lifted up in prayer to God. Therefore with a cordial love, and with all the powers of the soul, give yourselves up to this faithful

Saviour; and as he voluntarily suffered himself to be exposed to cruelty and rage, so likewise do you willingly present and devote yourselves to his service. Do not hesitate to become an insulting laughing-stock in following Christ. If the world points at you, if it insults and ridicules you, rejoice that you are made thus conformable to the suffering Jesus; and be assured, that he will one day present you to the Father in a glorious state, when he himself shall point you out and say, 'behold, here am I, and the children whom thou gavest me,' (Isaiah viii. 18. Heb. ii. 13.)

II. Let us now, in the next place, consider the effect produced by the means which Pilate made use of to release our blessed Saviour, and enquire what followed his being thus exhibited to the people.

First, It was followed by a tumultuous outcry. For 'when the chief Priests and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, crucify him! crucify him!' The people seemed, at first, to have felt some compassion at the deplorable appearance of the blessed Jesus; insomuch that they stood in a silent astonishment at the dismal spectacle. But the chief Priests and their officers, who, for their own interest, were obliged to join in the cry, and to gnash upon this innocent person with their teeth, (Ps. xxxv. 16.) were too malignant and cruel to be susceptible of any pity or compassion. They were not sensible that mercy is better than sacrifice, (Matt. ix. 13. xii. 7.) Here were verified these words to the Psalmist (Ps. xxii. 12, 13.) 'Many bulls have compassed me; strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.' Here was accomplished what the Lord Jesus had, in a parable, before declared to this perverse generation, saying, 'When the husbandmen saw the Son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; Come, let us kill him.' (Matt. xxi. 38.) The ac-

complishment of it was this: 'When the chief Priests saw him, they cried out, saying, crucify him!'

Thus the sight of this moving spectacle had quite a different effect on them from what Pilate had imagined. He hoped by so deplorable an object, to have moved them to compassion; but on the contrary, at the sight of the blood issuing from all parts of our Saviour's body, their thirst after his blood was the more inflamed. Here Solomon's assertion was abundantly verified, namely, 'The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.' (Prov. xii. 10.) No less savage are the men of this world in their rage against the faithful servants of Christ, who bear witness to the truth. The sympathetic feelings of humanity are turned into the most savage barbarity, by their hatred to Christ and his members. How must these outrageous clamours of the mad populace have affected the soul of the blessed Jesus! The wounds and stripes inflicted on him by the soldiers, did not cause him near so much pain as this inhuman rancour of his people.

But the same barbarous treatment which our blessed Lord here experienced, has been continued to his members. When the Asiatic Jews saw St. Paul in the Temple, 'They stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, crying out, men of Israel help.—And all the city was moved, and the people came together.—And as they went about to kill him, tidings came to the chief captain of the Band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.' (Acts xxi. 27—31.) And when St. Paul had thereupon made his defence, the whole multitude 'lift up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth! for it is not fit he should live. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, the chief Captain commanded him to be brought into the castle,' (Acts xxii. 23, 24.) The histories of the martyrs particularly prove that the Romish clergy never shewed themselves more outrageous than when they had Christ

sufferings before their eyes, in the persons of his members and faithful witnesses. Even thieves and robbers meet with some compassion, when they are punished for their offences; but when Christ in his members is tortured by fire or sword, they steel their breasts against all sentiments of pity and tenderness.

But alas! it little becomes sinners to rail against the enemies of Christ. The malignant spirit of Cain, which naturally dwells in us, cried through the Jewish people, Crucify him! Nay, what the deluded Jews did is daily repeated. All those who are not moved by the pains of a suffering Saviour, to renounce their ungodly ways, and fly from those sins which brought such sufferings upon him, do, in effect, cry out, Crucify him! Crucify him!

O blessed Jesus! grant that the consideration of thy manifold sufferings may have a nobler effect on our souls! Grant that we may cry out against our old man, Crucify him! Crucify him! and that we may do homage to thee as our lawful King. May every insult, and every pain which thou didst endure for our sake, inspire us with fresh motives to obedience, and gratitude for thy stupendous love.

Secondly, The next thing which happened after our Saviour was thus exhibited as a deplorable spectacle to the people, was Pilate's expostulation with the Jews; in which occurs,

1. Pilate's speech to them. Pilate, it seems grew so impatient at this last outcry of the Jews, that he broke out into these passionate expressions, 'Take ye him, and crucify him; for I find no fault in him.' In this he was so far to be commended, that he again publicly repeats his testimony of our blessed Lord's innocence. But, on the other hand, he is to be blamed for not opposing the Jews, who were for assuming the power of crucifying an innocent person, and for taking the guilt of it on themselves; at least, he might have declined giving them a permission amounting to an express command. Pilate had be-

fore taken Jesus and scourged him, (John xix. 1.) and now he is willing to permit others to take him away, and crucify him. How cruel is his mercy! What did it avail Pilate, that he was convinced of our Saviour's innocence? To what purpose did he now cry out a third time, 'I find no fault in him,' (See John xviii. 38. xix. 4. and 6.) since he acted contrary to such a conviction? Thus it will be of no benefit to us, to cry out, O Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world; unless we forsake our sins, in humility lay hold on Christ's innocence, and suffer his spirit to guide us, that we may serve him in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives? Preserve us, O Lord, from all such scandalous hypocrisy, that we may not confess thy innocence with our mouth; and yet crucify thee by our manifold sins and impieties, or without concern see thee taken away and crucified by others. This expostulation of Pilate was followed,

2. By the answer of the Jews, which was this: 'We have a law, and by our law he ought to die.' Hitherto, the accusation of the Jews against our blessed Saviour had turned chiefly on crimes against the civil government. They had charged him with forbidding the people to pay tribute to Cesar, and making himself a king. The former crime was detrimental to the emperor's treasury, as it tended to lessen his revenue, and the latter was high treason against his Imperial Majesty; and both were equally punishable with death. But Pilate, finding in the prisoner's confession no grounds for such an indictment, had, time after time, declared him innocent. The Jews therefore dropt those points at present, and returns to the charge with a new complaint of a different nature; which could not properly come under the cognizance of Pilate. By this proceeding they exposed the greatest mystery of their religion, and debased it in the eyes of the civil judge, who was a heathen, and understood nothing of it. But rage and

malice prompted them to trespass on what was sacred; for they little regarded how much it might be profaned before Pilate's tribunal. So much pains did these sons of malice and cruelty take to render Christ, the great author of salvation, the cause of condemnation to themselves.

The Jews, in answer to Pilate's expostulation, appealed to the law, and said, 'We have a law, and by that law he ought to die.' They had indeed a law, which condemned blasphemers and false prophets to be punished with death, (Lev. xxiv. 15, 16. Deut. xviii. 20.) But this law was most wrongfully applied to Christ, who had always highly honoured his Father. That Divine law, in which they ought to have discerned their wickedness, they used as a covering for their villainy. These very accusers of the Lord Jesus, were the greatest transgressors of the Divine law, (John vii. 19. Rom. ii. 23.) But when they were resolved at any rate to put Jesus to death, they made use of the law as a pretence to palliate their cruelty; and though they themselves impiously trampled the law under foot, yet they would fain have Christ executed as a transgressor of it.

How amazing and dreadful is the reflection, that the great Angel of the Covenant, who himself gave the law on Mount Sinai, should here be accused as a transgressor of the law! We, alas! had transgressed the Divine law, and by that law were to die. But, behold, he cometh in our stead, who could say, 'Thy law, O my God, is within my heart,' (Psalm xl. 8.) and permits the priests and people to cry out against him, 'by our law he ought to die.' The blessed Jesus thus suffers himself to be condemned by the law, that we may be acquitted by the gospel. Stupenduous love! immeasurable kindness!

At the same time, our blessed Lord has hereby sanctified the sufferings of his faithful servants, who frequently are declared heritics, and punished with death, through false interpretations of Scripture by

illiterate zealots. It is no small aggravation of the sufferings of Christians, when they are condemned by declarations out of the word of God wrested from their true meaning, by an iniquitous set of unmerciful judges. However, by the pretended condemnation of the Son of God, according to the sentence of the law, the sting of such an offence is taken away. Alas! Christ is daily crucified even among Christians, by those who have the Scripture in their mouth, and quote it like satan in the gospel, (Matt. iv. 6.) and yet make it a covering to their vices and wickedness, by picking out of it every thing they can to excuse and palliate their sinful actions, and, as it were, to make pillows on which their carnal security may repose itself.

But let us enquire, what particular law that was, by which the lawgiver himself was here adjudged to die? He has, say the Jews, made himself the Son of God. By their former accusation of setting up for a king, he had been arraigned for high treason against Cesar; but by this charge they make him guilty of high treason against the Divine Majesty. Thus they represent Jesus as one, who not only exalted himself above the head of the Roman empire, but above all created beings, and made himself equal with God. Consequently they make him guilty of death on a double account, namely, by the Roman laws, as a rebel, and by the Jewish law, as a blasphemer.

Alas! deluded mortals, it was not our blessed Saviour that made himself the Son of God, but he who said unto him, 'Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee,' (Psalm ii. 7. Heb. v. 5.) and who at the same time enjoined all 'the kings and judges of the earth to kiss, or worship, his Son.' We had arrogated an equality with God, for which here the real Son of God was to atone. In the state of innocence, we were the beloved children of God; but instead of resting satisfied with this honour, we would be as gods, (Gen. iii. 5.) On the contrary, by the

attempt, we became like unto our seducer the devil, and fell under the sentence of temporal and eternal death.

THE PRAYER.

THANKS be to thee, O blessed Jesus, for thine unspeakable love, which moved thee to debase thyself so low, and to permit such a false accusation to be brought against thee, as that thou madest thyself the Son of God; by which thou didst obtain for us the glorious privilege of being sons and daughters of the Almighty. Bless that part of the Divine word, which we have now considered. Grant that the contemplation of the mournful spectacle, exhibited to the people after thy painful scourging, may powerfully move the hearts of all those who, in their carnal security, are going forward in trespasses without any dread of the Divine wrath, and impress on them a deep sense of God's displeasure against sin. Grant that it may likewise become a comfort to all penitent and faithful Christians; and in all temptations to sin, put us again in mind of that part of thy sufferings, which we have now viewed as it were at a distance, that we may be powerfully restrained from yielding to them. Remind us more particularly of these thy sufferings at the tremendous hour of death, that we may thence derive comfort and confidence to recommend our souls to thee, our merciful Saviour, and die in thy faith. Grant this for the sake of thy name. Amen.

CONSIDERATION XIV.

PILATE'S LAST DISCOURSE WITH THE LORD JESUS.

'WHEN Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; and he went again in into the judgment-hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou?

But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not, that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: Therefore, he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin,' (John xix. 8—11.)

In these last words which Pilate spoke to the Lord Jesus, we may observe,

First, The occasion of this discourse: 'When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid, and went again into the judgment-hall. The chief priests, being disappointed in their first accusation, now brought a new article against the prisoner, and accused Jesus, saying, That he made himself the Son of God; and that consequently, according to their law, by which they were governed under the protection of the Romans, he ought to die. This new charge occasioned uncommon emotions in the mind of the Roman judge. For it was the belief of both Romans and Greeks, that there were a multitude of gods and goddesses, who propagated their race, and begot children; who sometimes used a visible shape to come down from heaven, and converse with men. Thus the heathens at Lystra took Paul and Barnabas for such deities, and cried out, 'The gods are come down unto us, in the likeness of men,' (Acts xiv. 11, 12.) When Pilate heard that Jesus made himself the Son of God, he concluded, that if he was the offspring of the immortal gods, some dreadful vengeance would fall on him and his family. For he had already caused this Divine person to be scourged, and permitted his soldiers to insult him with all manner of indignities, and illegal abuses. His conscience now reproached him for what he had done, and excited in him that servile fear of which the Evangelist takes notice above.

But by the words, 'he was the more afraid,' it appears that he had been very uneasy during the whole proceedings against Jesus, and that he had before been agitated with fear and terror, which he could not account for. For, notwithstanding all the meanness and ignominy which then surrounded the Lord Jesus, some majestic rays of his concealed glory beamed forth from him, and made such an impression on Pilate that he could not but conclude, that the person who now stood before his Tribunal was something more than human. He had before been struck with our blessed Lord's magnanimous silence; but now he was quite disturbed, when he heard that he had to do with the Son of God; and at the same time recollected, that he had heard of many surprizing miracles which had been wrought by this Jesus.

Something like this has often happened to other Pagan judges, in the persecutions of the members of Christ. They have been made sensible that Christians are quite of a different spirit from other malefactors. They have been thrown into fear and consternation, and have felt violent emotions at the undaunted appearance, and noble behaviour of martyrs and confessors. This servile fear, which often, though not always, appears in unjust judges, who condemn the innocent witnesses of the truth, serves as a testimony of the majesty and veneration which true religion carries along with it; since it strikes unbelievers with awe and terror.

Secondly, We may observe the question put by Pilate to the Lord Jesus. Pilate went again into the judgment-hall, that he might speak with Jesus apart and free from all noise and interruption, and said unto him, 'Whence art thou?' He does not by these words enquire after his earthly country, namely, whether he was of Judea, or Galilee? For he could not but conclude from the former accusations of the Jews, that he was of Galilee, since he had, on that account, sent him to Herod, under whose government that

province was. But by this question, Pilate's design was to inform himself of our Saviour's lineage and descent, viz. whether he was of divine or human extraction? and if the former was true, from what branch or family of the gods he was descended? This question arose chiefly from a vain curiosity. Besides, he wanted to be rightly informed of this, in order to get rid of his servile fear, which now began greatly to disturb his mind, and was still growing on him; so that it is little to be wondered at, that Pilate did not receive any answer from the blessed Jesus. The next particular which here deserves our notice, was,

Thirdly, The silence of our blessed Lord. 'But Jesus, saith the evangelist, gave him no answer.' It is observable that, from the history of the Passion, we find, that the nearer the Lord Jesus approached to his death, the less he conversed with men. However, he had his particular reasons for not entering into discourse with Pilate on this head.

For 1. It was a question quite foreign to the purpose, and did not properly belong to any court of human judicature.

2. This question put by Pilate did not proceed from a sincere love of truth, nor from a desire of knowing it; but from a mixture of curiosity and fear.

3. As Pilate, instead of regarding the answer which Jesus had made to his former question, viz. 'Art thou the king of the Jews,' had left him abruptly, and in a contemptuous manner had asked, What was truth; he did not deserve any further information.

4. This judgment on Pilate was, however, accompanied with some indulgence. Our blessed Lord well knew, that his eternal generation from the Father was far beyond Pilate's comprehension: He therefore saw, that it would only occasion him to sin further by insolently ridiculing that sacred truth, and by that means would aggravate his guilt, already very

great. Hence the benevolent Jesus, by his silence, prevented this increase of Pilate's condemnation.

5. Christ likewise confirmed his former command against giving sacred things to dogs, or throwing pearls before swine, (Matt. vii. 6.) by his silence on this occasion. Though wisdom be found of those that seek her, she is not to be allured or acquired by questions of mere curiosity. On the contrary, she turns aside from the frivolous, the self-sufficient, and the licentious. After this silence of the Lord Jesus, follows,

Fourthly, A fresh expostulation of Pilate with our blessed Lord. This just and discreet silence of Christ gave offence to Pilate, who construed it as a contempt of his dignity: Accordingly he says to Jesus, 'Speakest thou not unto me?' Thus he reproves him for not thinking him worthy of an answer, and adds, 'Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?' by which he gives him to understand that such behaviour at this crisis was contrary to all the rules of prudence. He hints to Jesus, that if he had a mind to be thought a son of God, he should shew himself a master of so much sense as to know that, instead of obstinately irritating his judge, he ought to endeavour to gain him over to his interest by humility and discretion. Thus Pilate vainly boasts of his power, notwithstanding the servile fear which sat so uneasy on his heart. He affects an air of grandeur, the better to conceal his inward trouble. He, on the contrary, ought to have exerted his power over the Jews, towards whom he behaves with a scandalous timerousness, and meanly complies with their unreasonable demands. But in this he acted after the manner of all the unjust magistrates of this world. When persecuted defenceless Christians are brought before them, they affect a great deal of state and grandeur, and boast of their extensive power and authority. Every petty judge then becomes a mighty potentate. But when they are cal-

led upon to exert their power in succouring the distressed, and protecting the innocent, against their potent oppressors, they are very silent on this head. Let us now consider,

Fifthly, Christ's answer to Pilate's last expostulation. As Pilate here encroached on the prerogative of heaven by vainly boasting of a power, which was not his own, but was intrusted to him by God, to whom he was accountable for it; the blessed Jesus found himself obliged by an inward impulse, to vindicate the honour of his Father by a short answer. He therefore addresses Pilate in these words: 'Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: Therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.' In this answer of our blessed Lord we may remark the following particulars.

1. He grants that Pilate, in quality of a judge, was invested with power and authority, but at the same time gives him to understand, that he derives his power from God; so that, consequently, he ought not to act arbitrarily, but, instead of consulting only his own pleasure, to use the power which he had received from above according to the pleasure and precepts of God. If he acted otherwise, the account he was to give would be very grievous. Thus our blessed Lord here confirms the truth, which was afterwards inculcated by St. Paul in these words: 'There is no power but of God: 'the powers that be are ordained of God,' (Rom. xiii. 1.)

2. He acquaints Pilate, that his power in the ordinary course of things did not properly extend over his person; for he says, 'Thou couldest have no power over ME.' All the Jews, indeed, who then lived in Palestine were under the dominion of the Roman emperor, and consequently were subject to Pilate, as his deputy. The Lord Jesus therefore, by excepting himself alone from Pilate's jurisdiction, gives him to understand, that he is not to look upon him as another

common Jew. For though Christ, according to the flesh, was descended from the Jewish Patriarchs; yet, at the same time, he was 'over all, God blessed for evermore,' (Rom. ix. 5.) In taking on him the form of a servant, he indeed 'submitted himself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; but according to his Divine nature, he was the Lord and creator not only of Pilate, but of the Roman emperor himself. In consequence of this, Pilate was so far from having any power over him, that he had a full and absolute power over Pilate; and of this he then gave a remarkable proof; for his presence filled Pilate's heart with fear and consternation. This was contrary to the usual course of things: for the prisoner on such occasions generally dreads, and trembles before his judge; whereas the reverse happened here, for the judge is terrified and struck with awe at the presence of the prisoner.

3. Our blessed Lord informs Pilate from whence the extraordinary power, which he now had over his body was derived. 'Thou couldest have no power at all against me, saith the Lord Jesus, unless it were given thee from above,' *i. e.* from God: For, as St. James observes, (Chap. i. 17.) 'Every good gift and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.' Thus the design of our blessed Saviour by this expression, is to refer Pilate to the counsel of God; and to direct his thoughts to a higher hand, by which he was brought to the painful death which now approached. For God from the foundation of the world, had determined that his Son should take the human nature upon him, and die a violent and bloody death, as atonement for the sins of the world. Instead of immediately executing this sentence on our Mediator, God was pleased to commit the execution of it to the sword of the magistrate; whom he has invested with power to punish those malefactors with death, who have forfeited their lives by their crimes, and against whom the word of God

has denounced sentence of death. As Pilate at that time bore the sword of justice in Judea, God, in an extraordinary manner, permitted that it should be used for executing that sentence, which he had long ago passed by an eternal decree on our surety. But in this transaction, the work of God, and the proceedings of Pilate are carefully to be distinguished. God, as the Supreme Judge of the world, made use of the judicial power of Pilate, in order to punish our sins which were imputed to Christ. But in the injustice of Pilate, and his cruel behaviour towards Jesus, God had no share; nor did the author of all good prompt him to those unjust proceedings, which he was guilty of in this trial: On the contrary, they were the workings of his own corrupt heart fomented by the suggestions of satan. Thus our blessed Lord acknowledges Pilate to be his judge; who indeed, according to the ordinary course of things, could have no power over him; but at this time, by an extraordinary dispensation of Providence, he had acquired power and authority over the Son of God.

4. Jesus remonstrates to Pilate, that he greatly sinned by abusing the civil power, which he had received from God. At the same time, our blessed Lord owns that the chief Priests and Scribes, by delivering him to Pilate, were guilty of the greater sin, and had the more to answer for. Indeed they had before condemned him to die, and only wanted to employ the civil judge as the instrument to put their unjust sentence in execution. The sin which these men were guilty of was of a much deeper dye than that committed by Pilate on this occasion; since they ought to have known from the writings of the prophets, who Jesus was. Nay, they must have been convinced in their hearts, that he was come from God, and that no man could do those miracles that Jesus had done, except God was with him, as Nicodemus acknowledges in the name of them all, (John iii. 2.) Jesus therefore readily owns this, and

by that means, as it were, cuts off Pilate's retreat; who would have laid the whole fault at the door of the Jews. Thus he said before, 'Am I a Jew? thine own nation, and the chief Priests have delivered thee unto me.'

Our blessed Lord does by no means exculpate Pilate, by making this acknowledgment; on the contrary, his design is rather to work on his conscience, and convince him of his heinous guilt. Pilate was very sensible that Jesus was innocent, and that the chief Priests had delivered him purely out of envy and malice; yet he did great violence, and acted quite contrary to this conviction. For he not only, as it were, staked the life of this innocent person against that of a notorious murderer, and caused him to be very inhumanly scourged; but permitted his soldiers to revile, insult, and commit all manner of outrages against him. Notwithstanding all this, Pilate could still presumptuously boast of his power, and insult the blessed Jesus, by saying, 'Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?' This assertion at the same time implied a great absurdity: For if Christ was innocent, Pilate had no legal power to order him to be crucified; and if, on the other hand, he was guilty, he had no right to release him. But the righteous God did not leave this injustice of Pilate unpunished; for, on a complaint of the Samaritans against him, he was sent prisoner to Rome by Vitellius; and was deprived of his post by the emperor Caligula, and then banished. At length, according to some historians, he put an end to his wretched life with his own hands in his exile. Thus the Divine vengeance pursued this unjust judge, and punished him for the abuse of his power in condemning the innocent Son of God. From this last discourse of Pilate with our blessed Saviour, we may learn the following truths:

1. Servile fear and terror may, indeed, cause great emotions in the human heart, but can never work a thorough change and amendment of it.

Pilate, who naturally did not want courage and resolution, was yet struck with a secret fear by the rays of the divinity which beamed forth in Jesus Christ. He was greatly afraid when he understood, that he had proceeded so far against a person who affirmed that he was a son of God, and his conscience forboded him no good for having suffered his soldiers to use Jesus in so contemptuous and inhuman a manner. But Pilate was only actuated by a base and servile fear. He was not much concerned because he had committed these acts of injustice and cruelty; but his fear proceeded from the apprehension, that the gods would not fail of punishing him in due time for the indignities he had offered to that divine person, who was the son of a deity. This servile fear had not in the least cured the malignity of Pilate's heart; for we find all his natural pride breaking forth soon after, in these words: 'Speakest thou not unto me?'

However, Pilate by his fear on this occasion may put thousands of bold, licentious Christians to the blush. This heathen was afraid, because he had suffered a son of the gods to be scourged. But who among us is afraid, when he is informed by the apostle that by his sins he has, as it were, crucified the Son of God afresh, (Heb. vi. 6.) But granting that it might occasion in such persons a servile fear; yet this is not sufficient to convert the heart. On the contrary, fatal experience shews that those, whom a base and servile fear, as the first fruits of repentance, had thrown into extreme dejection and agonies of mind, have generally on their recovery from such a state become more bold, licentious, and secure than they were before. But, if the sinner lets this servile fear get the dominion over him, it will only lead him to despair. A sinner who is accused by his own conscience must at first be awakened by a servile fear; which causes him to be afraid of God as a righteous judge, and of his temporal and eternal punishments. This fear, as it were, compels him to

abstain from many outward sins. But this servile fear of the divine Justice must afterwards be gradually purified, and refined into a filial awe and reverence, by the glorious gospel of God in Christ Jesus; and must be tempered with the love of God, which alone mends the heart, and produces in it a willing propensity to good.

Reflect all ye, who by the convictions of your consciences are awakened to a servile fear, that you are yet advanced no farther than Pilate who was a heathen; and that, if you break off here, or intend to proceed no farther in the work of conversion to God, you will be as little benefited by such convictions of your guilt, as he was by his conviction of our Saviour's innocence: Come therefore to God by Christ, the Son of his love, who will fill your hearts with perfect love, which casteth out slavish fear, (1 John iv. 18.)

O faithful Saviour! do thou fill our hearts with a filial love and fear of God, that we may not only avoid the punishments due to sin, but have an inward abhorrence of sin itself; especially as it brought so many sufferings on thy sacred person, and caused thy death on the cross.

2. There are many in our days who resemble Pilate; who out of vain curiosity are starting questions on the sublimest mysteries of religion, but at the same time shew a contempt of its fundamental truths.

Pilate, as we have observed above, had paid no regard to the confession, which Christ had made before him concerning his kingdom; and had made a jest of that important truth, which Christ came into the world to promulgate. But now he is for scaling the third heaven at once, and with his profane heathenish understanding, would fain penetrate into the most exalted mystery of Faith, namely, the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. But how many are there, who in our days presumptuously dispute and pretend to explain the mysteries of religion, before they know the first elements of Christianity, and while they are

slaves to their lusts and passion. Young students in divinity, by the conceit they entertain of their proud reason, are most in danger of this presumption. But too many of those, who vainly dispute about these awful mysteries of our religion, are but babes in the practice of Christianity; are strangers to repentance, self-denial, taking up the cross, and carrying it after Christ; and indeed, to learn and practice such things is generally the least of their desires. God reveals his secrets, as far as it concerns us to know, to babes and to the humble, but not to those proud spirits who are for unfolding every thing by the natural dint of their genius, and arrogantly soar above the native simplicity of God's word.

Blessed Jesus! preserve us from all presumption and vain curiosity in spiritual things. Grant that we may know ourselves, and from whence we are, namely, of sinful origin, before we take upon us presumptuously to explain thy mysterious generation, and say, Whence art thou? Let us first examine our own sinful genealogy, before we presume to trace that of heaven. May we rather, after the example of thine elect angels, as often as we look into the mysteries of thy sacred person and office, bow down our heads in token of our devout humility and reverence.

3. The wisdom of speaking and being silent at proper seasons, must be learned in the school of Christ.

Here we find remarkable instances of both. Here our wise Redeemer gave sufficient proof that he knew when to speak, and when to be silent. This consummate wisdom no man is naturally possessed of. The natural man often speaks when he should be silent, and is silent when he should open his mouth. He speaks whenever his own honour is called in question, and launches out into diffuse apologies; on the other hand, he has not a word to say when he should stand up for God's honour, and vindicate the character of his neighbour when he is wrongfully accused. But this wise lesson of speaking and being silent on pro-

per occasions, is to be learned only in the school of our crucified Saviour. For the inordinate desires of the heart are crucified on the cross of Christ, and are thus brought into due order; whereas they would otherwise extend their dominion over the tongue, and make it speak or be silent, just as the interest of self-love required. On the other hand by the grace imparted to us by Jesus Christ, we acquire an undaunted freedom to open our mouths and speak boldly, when the honour of God, and the good of our neighbour require it; though we foresee at the same time, that it will draw hatred and contempt upon us.

Teach us, O blessed Jesus, that great wisdom which no human skill can acquire. Keep the door of our lips, that we may learn to be silent when thy honour will not be promoted by our speaking. On the other hand, open thou our mouths by thy secret Ephatha, when we are called upon to defend thy honour and bear witness to the truth.

4. He that knows the danger of being entrusted with worldly power and authority, will not boast of such power when he is possessed of it; nor will he too eagerly desire it, if he has it not.

Probably, Pilate would have less to answer for in the great day of account, if his power in the days of his life had been less extensive. This will also be the unhappy case of many others. As carnal men abuse all the precious gifts of Heaven; as they employ their riches in riot and excess, and dedicate their beauty to voluptuousness, their learning and parts to wicked devices; so do they generally abuse the power which God has committed to their care, in their respective offices. How few, alas, know how to make a right use of it! how many convert it into an instrument of destruction to themselves and others! That officer, who has but fifty or a hundred men under his command, immediately fancies that he may do with them as he pleases; that he may treat them with the utmost haughtiness and cruelty; and that none of them

must dare to open his mouth against his arbitrary proceedings. But, alas, how wretchedly do these men deceive themselves! Men in power should consider, that they are partakers of the same common humanity with those whom they command; that they have naturally no superiority over them; that God is the only potentate; (1 Tim. vi. 15.) and that they owe their power to his free Grace, who has imparted to them the image of his supreme dominion, and has placed them over others in the kingdom of his power. But at the same time, they should reflect, that God will, one day, require of them a strict account, how they have used the power they had been entrusted with; and that he will then shew mercy to the poor and oppressed, but as the book of Wisdom expresses it, (Matt. vi. 2—7.) will mightily torment the mighty men, *i. e.* those who have used their power to the oppression of others, and contrary to the end for which it was ordained. If these things were duly considered, those who are in authority would use their power with fear and trembling. We should not envy others their power, nor, when we see how the high and mighty are obeyed at a word, wish for their exalted stations. Let us rather sit down contented in a low and humble station, as it exposes us to less danger here, and we shall have the less to answer for hereafter.

Give us herein to be of thy mind, O blessed Jesus, who in the humble state of thine abasement, wast subject to every ordinance of man, and, in the glorious state of thine exaltation, didst use thy unlimited power for the benefit of mankind, and the good of thy church. Grant that all subjects may imitate thee in the former, and that all sovereigns and persons in power may follow thy illustrious example in the latter.

5. It was for our pride and haughtiness, which would not be controlled by the Divine law, that the Son of God subjected himself to the power of a foreign judge.

Alas! the only Son of the Father, the judge of all flesh, would never have suffered himself to be brought before the tribunal of a Roman governor, and hear from him these insulting words, Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee?' 'if it had not been for our fall.' Our minds were filled with aspiring thoughts; nothing but absolute freedom and independency would satisfy us; and we were for being our own masters, without any superior to control us. This haughty temper is innate in the meanest peasant, who, naturally, will neither submit to God or man. Therefore, He from whom men hold their power himself submitted to human power, and, in order to atone for our arrogance and refractoriness, humbled himself under the authority of a Pagan judge. But if we would receive any benefit from Christ's abasement, we must not continue under the dominion of this natural depravity; but, with shame, sorrow, and contrition, bring our rebellious, refractory minds, which would tear asunder the bands of all order and society, to the obedience of the cross, and pray that our ungovernable pride may be changed into submission and lowliness.

O my Saviour! do thou subdue our hearts, and break our stubborn tempers, and make them conformable to thy gentle, passive, and obedient mind. Give us such a ready willingness to submit to all lawful authority, that we may rather choose to obey than to command.

He, who suffers himself to be seduced to sin by others, is by no means innocent in the sight of God; though the person that seduced him has more to answer for.

The guilt of the seducer most certainly exceeds that of the seduced, and consequently the former may expect a heavier judgment than the latter. This is evident from the words of our blessed Saviour: 'He who delivered me unto thee,' and thus seduced thee to all these acts of injustice, 'hath the greater sin.'

In these words, our blessed Lord allows that there are degrees of sin. Judas, Annas, and Caiphas, together with the great council of the Jews, sinned more in their proceedings against Christ, than Pilate did: For they had more knowledge; their sin was preceded by longer consultations; they had likewise received more admonitions; they were under a greater obligation, by shewing a good example, to set Pilate in the right way; and lastly, they added hypocrisy to their wickedness, and abused the word of God, by making it a cloak for their villainy. Hence are derived the following rules, by which we may measure the degrees of those sins, which are committed under different circumstances.

1. The more knowledge any person is endowed with, the greater is his sin, (Luke xii. 47.)

2. The more premeditation precedes any sin, the greater is the sin; since such previous consideration shews the force of the sinful purpose, and a pertenacious perseverance in wickedness.

3. The more admonitions have preceded any sinful act, the greater is the sin.

4. The greater the obligation a person has to set a good example to others, the greater the sin which he commits.

5. The more hypocrisy is intermixed with a wicked action, the greater is the sin. But at present I shall wave any farther enlargement upon this subject.

We shall at this time only take notice of the following rule, namely, That the sin of the seducer is greater than the sin of the seduced; and this observation is so clearly proved by the words of the Lord Jesus, as to be above all contradiction. O that this truth may be particularly attended to by all those, who have made such progress in satan's school, that he can use them as engines to seduce others. Is it not sufficient, ye sons of wickedness, that you treasure up against the day of wrath and the just judgment of God, a treasure of wrath, by your own sins? Will ye

Jesus makes mention of a power given to Pilate over his person from above; but, at the same time, signifies to him, that if he abused that power, he would commit a heinous sin, and draw upon himself a grievous punishment from above. Now these were such truths as immediately touched Pilate's natural conscience to the quick; and this being added to the fear he was already seized with, on account of the information he had received that Jesus was the Son of God, excited this pagan judge to make a fresh effort to release Jesus. Hence we shall deduce the following truths:

1. A free confession of the truth has a great influence over the human mind, and is attended with a blessing.

We here see in Pilate an instance, that sometimes even the most haughty and unjust persons are moved by an ingenuous confession. A similar instance occurs in the life of St. Paul, (Acts xxvi. 31, 32.) who by a noble freedom and bold declaration of the truth, convinced his judge, that he had done nothing amiss. The same effect the declarations of the primitive Christians, in the succeeding persecutions, had on the hearts of the heathens; for by the power of truth, they made such an impression on the consciences of their judges, that they were sometimes observed to turn pale and tremble amidst all the state and pomp of their office. Let us therefore implore of God to give us the boldness of faith; and let us use it with humility and discretion according to our Saviour's example, and then it will prove a blessing to ourselves and others.

2. God sometimes causes the purposes of the wicked to turn out quite contrary to their expectations, in the event.

The chief Priests imagined, that by accusing the blessed Jesus of having made himself the Son of God, they should quite overcome Pilate's reluctancy, and make him act according to their desires. But this

accusation, on the contrary, only made Pilate the more cautious and fearful of condemning Christ, and consequently more solicitous for having him released. This is frequently the case in our days, satan and the world often combine to do all the hurt they can to a soul, that is earnestly bent on turning from them to Jesus Christ. The former assails it from within, the latter attacks it from without. Both of them endeavour to terrify the afflicted soul, so that it may cast away all hopes of deliverance. By God's superintending providence, these wicked machinations have quite another effect; for a soul thus agitated by the buffetings of satan, and the injuries of the world, is driven to prayer and repentance, and by that means to the bosom of everlasting love. Thus the goodness and wisdom of God are able to turn the most pernicious views of satan to the good of our souls. What an invaluable privilege is this of the children of God, that among all the devices of their spiritual and temporal enemies, they may be easy, confident, and undaunted? that they may joyfully say with the generous patriarch Joseph, 'Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good,' (Gen. l. 20.)

II. In the next place, we are to consider the violent effort, which rendered the purpose of Pilate ineffectual. As Pilate did not set out right at first, nor walk in the plain and strait path of justice, his subsequent endeavours to release Jesus proved abortive; and his resolution was so shaken by a violent tempest, that at length is was obliged to give way. For the Jews, perceiving what Pilate had in view, cried out, 'If thou let this man go, thou art not Cesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Cesar.' Here the Jews have recourse again to their former accusation, and charge our blessed Lord with crimes against the Roman government. As Pilate had betrayed some visible signs of fear upon hearing the other charge, namely,

that Jesus made himself the Son of God; they drop the theological article, and revive the old complaint, affirming that he set himself up for a king.

But here they also give fresh force to their first accusation, by deducing from it such an alarming inference, as might well stagger Pilate's resolution. Their inference was this: Whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cesar, *i. e.* opposes the Roman emperor's right over the province of Judea, and thereby lays a foundation for tumults and rebellion. This position in itself is not ill grounded. When a person gives himself out to be a king, and attempts to get the government into his hands, in a country over which there is a settled sovereign, he must undoubtedly be looked on as an enemy of the reigning sovereign. But from this true position they draw a very wrong conclusion. "This Jesus," say they, gives it out in Judea that he is a king; therefore he speaks against Cesar." From this they farther conclude, that if Pilate should let this man go, he was not Cesar's friend. For how should he be a friend to the emperor, who protected a person that was his open enemy; and when the prisoner is brought before him in bonds and fetters, in order to be punished, is for letting him go, that he may again carry on his seditious practices against Cesar. This false reasoning struck this mighty statesman with a terrible panic; and he was so entangled in this web which these sophisters had spun, that he was not able to extricate himself out of it. The fear of the emperor's displeasure, with which he was indirectly threatened, shook the foundations of his good intention, so that he fluctuated between doubts and fears.

Hence we shall deduce the following truths:

1. Satan is very dexterous in attacking every man on that side, where he can make the least defence.

This was the way he went to work with Pilate. The menace of the Emperor's displeasure was a thunder-clap, which struck him with such dread and

consternation that he could not again collect himself. Thus satan found out his weak side, where he was the least prepared for an attack. For there is nothing which ministers of state are more afraid of than their sovereign's displeasure; being very sensible, that it may be attended with disgrace and the loss of all their temporal possessions.

This advantage the subtil fiend continually makes use of, to tempt men to sin. He knows the natural constitution and predominant inclinations of every one, and directs his temptations accordingly. He knows how to lay the bait to allure, and at other times how to terrify the sinner. The proud and ambitious man he entices to sin by the hopes of temporal honours, and terrifies him with the fear of disgrace, and of being deprived of his posts and dignities. He allures a voluptuous sensualist by the bait of carnal delights and elegant entertainments; and, on the other hand, he terrifies him with the fear of affliction, imprisonment, distress, and pain. He draws in the miser by the hopes of profit, and other temporal advantages, and terrifies him with the fear of losing his estate and money. When, for instance, a man is immoderately fond of this world, and falls into such circumstances, that, on one side, he has hopes of making great additions to his fortune by renouncing the truths of the gospel, and going over to the kingdom of darkness; but, on the other hand, by steadfastly adhering to the pure truth of the gospel, he is in danger of being stripped of every thing he has; satan points his batteries against that side of the heart where it is weakest. He lays hold of him by his fondness for earthly things, and suggests to him, that he may for once set aside his conscience, otherwise he must be reduced to want and poverty. At the same time, he represents the danger to be very great, and the loss irretrievable; so that at length, the unwary sinner, unless some higher strength enable him to withstand the temptation, and his soul be fortified by grace, surrenders himself on

satan's terms. Happy are they, who are made wise by the miscarriage of others! who learn to secure their innocence, and to know their own weakness, that the evil one may not take advantage of it to their destruction.

2. We can never be secure from satan's assaults till we have intrenched ourselves within a settled resolution of denying the world.

We are like an open city, without fornication, walls, or motes; and consequently cannot sustain a siege. This Pilate found to be true by fatal experience. The favour of the Roman Emperor being, as he thought of greater concern to him than a good conscience and the favour of God, he at last sunk under the temptation which assaulted him. By one indirect menace of the Emperor's displeasure, he lays down his arms. His haughtiness which, but a little before, had displayed itself in these arrogant words, 'Knowest thou not that I have power to release thee,' was at once pulled down; and the devil gained a compleat triumph over his weakness.

Thus it happens when a man accounts the friendship of the world, and favour of the great, an indispensible part of his happiness. Then, in order to avoid the loss of it, integrity and a good conscience are frequently laid aside, and he becomes the contemptible slave of those whom he looked upon as his vassals. Here we see how far the natural love of virtue and justice extends; and that is no further than to the confines of denying the world. Pilate, for the sake of Christ and his own integrity, should have risqued the danger of being informed against at Rome, as a favourer of the emperor's enemies; on the contrary, he became a betrayer of Justice, and delivered the innocent into the hands of his enemies. Let this be a warning, and powerful incitement to us, absolutely to deny the world and all its sinful customs. The world must be so little to our eyes, and our Saviour so great, that we should be ready to part

with all, rather than offend him by any deliberate sin, or injure his honour. This renouncing of the world is the partition-wall between mere morality and genuine Christianity. Whatever progress a person by his natural strength may make in the government of his passions, and the practice of outward moral virtues, if he does not deny himself, and renounce the world, he will yield to the first temptation that assaults him. Whoever does not fear and love God above all things, and put an entire trust and confidence in him, will not be able to act even in a temporal office with untainted integrity, and a conscience void of offence; much less will he be able worthily to discharge a spiritual office: But as soon as he is threatened by the great and powerful, he will, like Pilate, set aside his conscience, and do what he himself knows to be sinful. In a word, he will not be able rightly to perform one single duty that the Christian religion requires. For however praise-worthy his intention may be, and though he has even made a good beginning towards putting it into execution; yet when he comes to be menaced by others, who say all manner of evil of him; he then forgets his laudable designs, conforms to the world, and again gives himself up to what he had hitherto avoided from the dictates of his conscience. Hence we may see, that Christ lays no unnecessary burden upon us, in requiring that we should renounce the world; on the contrary, we should look upon it as a necessary preservative against the snares of the tempter.

III. We come, in the last place, to consider the consequence of Pilate's timidity and irresolution; and here the three following particulars deserve our notice.

First, The preparation made for condemning the Lord Jesus. This is described in these words: 'When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth,' out of the hall of Judgment, where he had privately examined him whether he was the Son of

God, 'and sat down in the Judgment-seat, in a place that is called the pavement, but in the Hebrew Gabbatha.' There was probably a pompous tribunal erected adjoining to Pilate's house, on a raised paved area, where he usually pronounced sentence of death on malefactors. In this elevated seat of judgment he seats himself with great parade; and as he had extremely weakened his authority by his scandalous pliableness throughout this whole affair, he was now for recovering the respect due to him, by pronouncing sentence on Jesus with great pomp and solemnity.

St. John likewise particularly specifies the time of the day, and the season of the year, when this happened. Concerning the latter the Evangelist says, 'It was the Preparation,' *i. e.* the day before the Sabbath, (Mark xv. 42.) or the Friday preceding the Passover, when they prepared themselves for the approaching Sabbath, which was a high day, and to be observed with particular solemnity. As for the time of the day, the Evangelist observes, that it was 'about the sixth hour,' *i. e.* according to our computation of time, about twelve of the clock at noon. For the Jews used to compute their hours from Sun rising, and divided the day into twelve equal parts or hours, (See John xi. 9.) 'Are there not twelve hours in the day?' Thus it appears, that it was twelve of the clock or near mid-day. There is nothing contradictory to this in the gospel by St. Mark, (chap. xv. 25.) who says, that it was about the third hour when they crucified our blessed Saviour. For either these words may be rendered, 'It was the third hour, after they had crucified him,' namely, when the soldiers, as we have observed above, parted his garments; or the third hour in St. Mark may be understood of the second larger division of the day, which began at the end of the third hour from sun-rising. For as the Jews divided the night into four parts or watches; so likewise they divided the day into four parts or equal divisions, called the temple-hours, or hours of prayer.

Each of these divisions took its name from the hour of the day, at the end of which it began. For instance, the first quarter or division of the day was called the first temple-hour, and comprehended the first, second, and third, of the twelve common hours of the day. The second division was called the third temple-hour, which lasted from the fourth to the fixth hour of the day inclusively, in which the condemnation of Jesus happened. The third great division was called the sixth hour, which included the seventh, eighth, and ninth hour of the day, during which our blessed Saviour was crucified. The fourth division was called the ninth hour, and this included the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth hour of the day. By either of these methods, the two Evangelists may very easily be reconciled, without the least necessity of making any alteration in the text, of either St. John or St. Mark's gospel. Indeed there are a few copies where the fourteenth verse of the nineteenth chapter of St. John runs thus, 'It was about the third hour.' This was the preparation which Pilate made for condemning the Lord Jesus. After this follows,

Secondly, Pilate's last effort to release our blessed Lord; but this was very faint, and proved ineffectual. 'And he said unto the Jews, Behold your king!' As if he had said, Look on him again; consider how severely he has been handled, by scourging and other abuses. Suppose he has acted indiscreetly, he seems to have been sufficiently punished; for you see what a wretched spectacle he is. Now I refer it to you, whether it would not better become you to shew him mercy and spare his life, than to punish him any farther.

But the Jews cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! He is none of our king, Crucify him!' Hence it appears, that these words of Pilate only added fuel to the flames. 'Pilate then saith unto them, shall I crucify your king? He now would fain work on them by remonstrating, that such an action would be a scandal to them, and what an indeliable stain

they would bring on their nation, by occasioning it to be said by foreigners, The Jews suffered their king to be crucified. But alas! such motives had little weight with a tumultuous rabble, frantic with rage and cruelty. Upon other occasions, men are apt to stand very much on their reputation, and think that whoever touches their character, touches their life. But this their so highly valued reputation they willingly sacrifice to their hatred against Christ.

On this remonstrance of Pilate, the chief Priests at last broke out into this declaration, which redounds to their eternal infamy. 'We have no king but Cesar.' At other times they grievously murmured against the Roman yoke, and held it inconsistent with their honour and liberty, to pay tribute to the emperor; but their hatred against Christ made them now pretend to be very loyal subjects to Cesar, rather than acknowledge for their Messiah and king, the unhappy victim of their malice who now stood before them; and rather than take on themselves the easy yoke of Christ's gospel, they choose to be vassals and servants to the tyrannical and cruel Tiberius. In this remarkable declaration, the Priests and Elders of the people proceeded to such a pitch of abandoned wickedness, as publicly to disown the hope of Israel, namely, the Messiah, who had been promised to them under the title of a king, and to deny this important article of their religion, before a Pagan governor. At the same time, by these words, 'We have no king but Cesar,' they again indirectly threatened him with the emperor's displeasure: As if he had said, "We are loyal subjects to the Roman emperor, and have brought this rebel before you to be punished. Now if you discharge him, we are obliged in conscience as priests and rulers, to lay a report of it before his Imperial Majesty." This was the last assault on Pilate's heart, which carried the fortress after a faint resistance of some hours. Upon this followed,

Thirdly, The actual condemnation of the Lord Jesus; which is thus related by St. Matthew, (chap.

xxvii. 24, 25.) and in our opinion, may very properly be introduced in this place. 'When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made; he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: See ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us and our children! Then he delivered him to be crucified.' In this account we may observe,

1. The motives that induced Pilate to condemn Jesus. These were not any crimes which our Lord had committed: for of those which had been laid to his charge, the judge had several times publicly acquitted him. Pilate therefore was at last induced to pronounce the sentence, partly because there was no hopes of giving a turn to the affair, by bringing the Jews to consent that Jesus should be released; and partly because there was reason to fear that farther opposition might occasion an insurrection: For in such a case the people would have assaulted and sacked the governor's house; and consequently Pilate have been brought under much greater difficulties to defend his conduct at the court of Rome. These were the motives by which Pilate was at last induced to proceed to the condemnation of our blessed Saviour.

2. Pilate's declaration and protest, antecedent to the sentence. 'Pilate, as the Evangelist observes, took water and washed his hands before the multitude.' It was an usual ceremony both among the Jews (Deut. xxi. 6.) and heathens, to wash the hands as a token of a person's innocence. This custom Pilate here observes, and, besides the mere ceremony, expresses in words what he intended by this symbol, by saying, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just man: See you to it.' By this, he once more publicly acknowledges the innocence of the Lord Jesus, whom he stiles a just man, an appellation which Pilate's wife had before given to our blessed Saviour. He then turns off the blame of Christ's death from himself, and lays it on the consciences of the Jews. Thus

his design was, by washing his hands, to hint to the Jews, that as his hands which he had just washed were entirely clean, so would he be clear from all guilt, on account of the sentence and execution of this just man. As if he had said, You have absolutely compelled me to order this innocent person to be crucified and put to death; and you must be answerable for it before God and man.

Upon this, these infatuated wretches, without any scruple, took the guilt of this horrid crime on their own consciences; and unanimously cried out, 'His blood be on us, and on our children!' By this they signified, that they were certainly convinced that this Jesus deserved to die as a seducer of the people, and that Pilate had no manner of reason to be apprehensive of being called to any account for it; but that they dealt sincerely with him, and would be answerable for any blame which he might incur by it, before God and man. Nay, they farther engaged their own persons and their children, that the condemnation of this man would not be followed by any punishment; and if such a thing should happen, which was not at all probable, they solemnly promised to take the whole of it on themselves and their posterity. 'His blood, said they, be on us, and on our children.' O dreadful words, which indicate the greatest infatuation and obduracy! How soon did that wretched nation feel the load of this curse to which they impiously devoted themselves, and which fell in a most signal manner on their heads, and that of their descendants, who have been groaning under its oppressive weight more than seventeen centuries.

3. We have here the sentence itself: 'Then he delivered him to be crucified.' Now Pilate, sitting with great pomp on his judgment-seat, pronounced the sentence for crucifying Jesus, and declared that he would give him up to his soldiers to be crucified; since the Jews had openly declared, that they would be answerable for all the guilt and ill consequences that might attend this proceeding. On these cir-

cumstances, we shall make the following observations, with which we shall conclude this Consideration.

First, That every circumstance of our blessed Saviour's passion has been conducted by the Divine wisdom.

1. It was not by mere accident that Pilate pronounced sentence on the blessed Jesus in a place, which from its elevation was called Gabbatha. For this condemned Jesus was to stand for an ensign lifted up on high to all nations, to which the Gentiles should seek, (Isaiah xi. 10.) Therefore his sentence of condemnation was to be pronounced in a raised place, publicly in the eyes of the whole world, and not in a corner.

2. The specifying of the hour, in which the sentence was pronounced, indicates, that as God tells the hours in the sufferings of his blessed Son, so does he likewise in the suffering of his children by grace and adoption. Time never seems more tedious to men, than when they labour under sufferings. Then they not only count the days, but the very hours and minutes. But God likewise counts the hours of their sufferings, and for every hour of pain, reproach, or mockery, will add a new gem to their diadem of glory. Hence we ought to be thoroughly persuaded, that as the providence of God over-ruled with regard to the time and place of the condemnation and crucifixion of our blessed Lord, so likewise will it also direct the time and place of our sufferings for his sake; and that no affliction shall befal us, at any place or time but by the appointment or permission of our heavenly Father, the supreme disposer of all events.

Secondly, As we often illegally place ourselves on the Judgment-seat of private censure, to condemn our innocent neighbour; so the Son of God was to suffer himself to be condemned, by an iniquitous judge on his seat of judgment.

Our blessed Lord has solemnly warned us, saying, 'Judge not; condemn not;' but who is it that pays

a due regard to these precepts? Of all our Saviour's injunctions, not one is more frequently violated than this; and this is frequently done, not only by the ignorant and unlearned, but by those also who know better, and observe a decent regard to religion in their outward behaviour. At polite visits and other meetings, what is the usual topic of conversation, but censure? We condemn our absent neighbour; his gesture, his sayings, and all his actions are canvassed over, exposed, censured, and judged, without the least indulgence. On such occasions, frequently a definitive sentence is unjustly pronounced, without allowing the party condemned a hearing. Now as we so often ascend the seat of judgment, and, instead of judging ourselves, and strictly examining our own actions, precipitately condemn our neighbour; the Son of God was pleased to submit to this condemnation, which was pronounced from an unjust tribunal. May this consideration awaken in us all an absolute abhorrence of all scandal, rigid censures, and calumny.

Thirdly, So great is the benevolence of God, that he often out of his exuberant goodness, as it were, presses his overtures of grace on man.

As Pilate, in the instance before us, is for obtruding Jesus on the Jews as their King, when they vehemently rejected him, and would hear of no such thing; God often proceeds in the same manner with sinners, not only by making a tender of his grace to them with singular impressions; but he, as it were, presses them to accept of it. Sometimes, in order to win their stubborn and refractory hearts, he showers down a profusion of blessings on them. Sometimes he finds it necessary to make use of the rod of correction; lays them on a sick bed; permits them to fall into difficulties; and by these visitations, earnestly labours to gain their minds. But if, after all these indulgent trials and awakening calls, they still continue unmoved; what can follow but a severe account for the obstinate rejection of such repeated offers of grace? But, alas! how often have we been thus in-

sensible to the convictions, admonitions, and chastisements, of God's blessed Spirit; so that in a carnal security, we have wished to shake them off. Now that even this grievous sin might be remitted to the penitent, the Son of God has, by these circumstances of his passion, acquired the remission of them.

Fourthly, The sin of the Jews in rejecting the Messiah, is daily committed among Christians.

This is frequently done by those worldlings, who prefer their carnal lusts and temporal enjoyments to that fellowship of Jesus Christ, to which they are called in the gospel. The Jews cried out, 'We have no king but Cesar!' And does not the covetous man cry out, I have no king but mammon? The proud and ambitious cries out, I have no king but my honour and reputation! The sensualist cries out, I have no king but pleasure! Away with such a king, who commands me to crucify my flesh, who would oblige me to break with my jovial companions, and live like a hermit; away with him! such a sovereign shall by no means rule over me. But they are likewise guilty of the same crime as the Jews were, though in an indirect manner, who seek salvation in any other name, but that by which God has appointed that we should be saved, (Acts iv. 12.) Those who would obtain an exemption from punishment, forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation, by the merits and intercession of others among the living, or the dead, presumptuously reject the Son of God the only Mediator and Saviour of mankind, and chuse for themselves other saviours, as impotent as themselves. May the Lord keep us from such an infatuation, that we may not feel the truth of these words of the Psalmist: 'Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another God.' (Psalm xvi. 4.)

Fifthly, the blood of Christ has both a vindictive, and a conciliatory power.

It is poured down in vengeance on those who trespass against it, either by placing in it a carnal and presumptuous confidence, notwithstanding their wicked lives and impenitent hearts; or by treading under

foot, and accounting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing. These deluded sinners will, by the Divine justice, be persecuted as murderers of Christ; and the blood of the Lamb of God, which was shed for the purifying of the conscience, and the forgiveness of sins, will be poured on them in vengeance and judgments. On the other hand, it's healing, conciliatory power manifests itself to all humble broken, and contrite hearts. It is to them the means of justification, and all their sins will be forgiven them in consideration of this precious blood. It is poured upon them in sanctification and holiness; for if they walk in the light, it more and more cleanses them from all sin and filthiness of flesh and spirit, (1 John i. 7. 2 Cor. vii. 1.) It also pours inexpressible blessings on their hour of death, and opens to them a passage from death unto life. (John v. 24.)

May God of his infinite mercy grant, that the blood of Jesus Christ may, in this blessed manner be on us, and on our children, and that it may manifest its reconciling, justifying, and sanctifying power in all our hearts! May he further be pleased to grant, that all the foregoing Considerations on the sufferings of Christ before the civil Tribunal of Pilate and Herod may be of real benefit to our immortal souls!

THE PRAYER.

O FAITHFUL Saviour! may thy blood be on us, and on our children, not in its vindictive, but its conciliatory power, to the quieting of our consciences, the sanctifying of our souls, and the purifying of our hearts. Bless all the considerations on this part of thy sufferings; and grant that we may not lose or throw any grace wrought in us, by the co-opperation, of thy good spirit. We recommend to thee the seed of so many important and saving truths, now sown; water them with the salutary dew of thy blessing, that they may bring forth in use the fruit of good living to the honour and praise of thy name. Amen.

END OF THE SECOND PART.

PART III.

OF THE

SUFFERINGS

OF

CHRIST

ON MOUNT GOLGOTHA.

The accounts given by the four Evangelists, (Matt. xxvii. 31—66. Mark xv. 20—47. Luke xxiii. 26—56. John xix. 16—42.) connected and harmonised.

'THEN the soldiers took off the purple robe from Jesus, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him. And Jesus went forth, bearing the cross. And there were also two malefactors led with him to be put to death. And as they led Jesus away, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, the father of Alexander and Rufus, who passed by, coming out of the country: And they laid hold on him, and compelled him to bear his cross; and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus.

'And there followed him a great company of people, and women who also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them, said, daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me; but for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in which they shall say, blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps that never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, fall on us, and to the hills, cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

'And they bring him unto a place, called in the Hebrew Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, the place of a skull. And they gave him to drink vinegar [or sour wine] mingled with myrrh and gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink; and he received it not. And they crucified him there, and two other malefactors with him, one on the right hand and the other on the left, and Jesus in the midst. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, and he was numbered with the transgressors. Then saith Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

'And Pilate wrote a superscription of his accusation, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews; for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief Priests of the Jews to Pilate, write not the King of the Jews; but that he said, I am the King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written, I have written. Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts (to every soldier a part) and also his coat: Now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be. And they cast lots upon it, what every man should take; that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did. And sitting down, they watched him there; and it was about the third hour when they crucified him.

'And the people stood beholding; and they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the Temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself; if thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief

Priests, mocking him with the Scribes and Elders, said, He saved others, himself he cannot save. If he be the Christ, the King of Israel, the chosen of God, let him save himself, and now come down from the cross, that we may see it, and we will believe him. He trusted in God, let him deliver him now, if he will have him; for he said, I am the Son of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him and offering him vinegar; and saying, If thou be the King of the Jews, save thyself. The thieves also, who were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. And one of the malefactors, who were hanged, railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.

'But the other answering, rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly: for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, verily, I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in Paradise. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his Mother, Woman, behold thy Son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

'Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour; and the sun was darkened. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, *Eli, Eli, lamma sabachthani*, that is to say, My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, Behold, This man calleth for Elias. After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of

'And they bring him unto a place, called in the Hebrew Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, the place of a skull. And they gave him to drink vinegar [or sour wine] mingled with myrrh and gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink; and he received it not. And they crucified him there, and two other malefactors with him, one on the right hand and the other on the left, and Jesus in the midst. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, and he was numbered with the transgressors. Then saith Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

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'And the people stood beholding; and they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the Temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself; if thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief

Priests, mocking him with the Scribes and Elders, said, He saved others, himself he cannot save. If he be the Christ, the King of Israel, the chosen of God, let him save himself, and now come down from the cross, that we may see it, and we will believe him. He trusted in God, let him deliver him now, if he will have him; for he said, I am the Son of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him and offering him vinegar; and saying, If thou be the King of the Jews, save thyself. The thieves also, who were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. And one of the malefactors, who were hanged, railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.

'But the other answering, rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly: for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, verily, I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in Paradise. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his Mother, Woman, behold thy Son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

'Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour; and the sun was darkened. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, *Eli, Eli, lamma sabachthani*, that is to say, My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, Behold, This man calleth for Elias. After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of

Among these were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of Joses, who sat over against the sepulchre, and beheld how, and where, his body was laid. And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments, and rested the sabbath day, according to the commandment. Now the next day that followed the day of the preparation, the chief Priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore, that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: So the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch; go your way, make it as sure as you can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.'

THE PREPARATORY PRAYER.

O FAITHFUL Saviour, who was crucified in weakness, but now livest in power, and canst forever save all those who come to God through thee; It is our purpose now to consider the concluding scene of thy sufferings on mount Golgotha. O thou crucified Love! be pleased to favour this our weak attempt, and make it conducive to the glory of thy name. Give us a lively sense of our incapacity so to conduct these Considerations, that they may be a real benefit and blessing to us. Grant that this sense of our weakness may awaken in us an earnest desire of the Divine assistance, and the influence of thy Spirit; and satisfy this desire, by giving us all those talents and graces, which thou thyself knowest to be necessary towards an edifying consideration of thy sufferings. Amen.

CONSIDERATION I.

THE LORD JESUS LED TO HIS CRUCIFIXION.

IN the preceding Considerations, we have discoursed of the several sufferings which our dear Mediator, for our sins, endured on the Mount of Olives; before the spiritual court of the Jews; and the civil tribunal of Pilate and Herod.

It now remains, that we consider his sufferings on Mount Golgotha, the place appointed by the infinite wisdom of God for the conclusion of our blessed Lord's meritorious afflictions. The beginning of this remarkable transaction runs thus.

'Then the soldiers took the purple robe off from Jesus, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him. And Jesus went forth, bearing his cross. And there were also two other malefactors led with him, to be put to death. And as they led Jesus away, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, the father of Alexander and Rufus, who passed by, coming out of the country: And they laid hold on him, and compelled him to bear his cross; and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus. And there followed him a great company of people, and of women who also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them, said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me; but weep for yourselves, and for your children,' &c. (Matt. xxvii. 31, 32. Mark xv. 20, 21. Luke xxiii. 26—32. John xix. 16, 17.)

These words exhibit to us the mournful procession of the blessed Jesus to his crucifixion. Our blessed Lord had, in his former sufferings, been forced to take several painful and ignominious walks. From the mount of Olives he had been hurried, bound as a prisoner, to Annas; from Annas to Caiaphas, from

Caiaphas to Pilate, from Pilate to Herod, and from Herod back again to Pilate; and consequently, he may be supposed to have passed through most of the streets in Jerusalem. Now our blessed Saviour was to take his last mournful walk, when he was led as a malefactor from Pilate's house to the place of execution.

Jesus was led away immediately after sentence had been pronounced on him by Pilate. 'Then,' (John xix. 16.) *i. e.* immediately after this, Pilate delivered him up to the Roman soldiers, in order to be crucified; for among the Romans, the soldiers were usually the executioners in such cases. The Roman emperor Tiberius, who then sat on the throne, had, about seven years before, issued an order, That no criminal should be executed until ten days after sentence had been pronounced upon him. But the benefit of this edict did not extend to murderers and rebels, it being judged necessary for the public tranquility that such delinquents should be immediately put to death. Our blessed Saviour therefore was not intitled to this privilege; for he had been indicted as a mover of sedition and a rebel, and one whom the Jews were for sending out of the world with all possible dispatch, as a pest to the commonwealth, and a scandal to the Jewish church. Nay, they urged the Roman governor with such vehemence, that he was obliged to give orders for the immediate execution of the sentence. No one offered to prepare Jesus for death; no one interposed in his favour, or spoke a word of exhortation or comfort to him; but he was dragged away to death with the utmost precipitancy, as one that was past all hopes of amendment, and unworthy of the notice of the humane and charitable. He, indeed, stood in no need of comfort or preparation for death; for he was long since prepared for it, by his patient submission and willingness to suffer; but he denied himself all human comforts, that he might acquire for us a right to expect divine conso-

lations in our last hours. By the precipitancy with which he was led to death, he moved his heavenly Father to grant to every one, in his preparation for death, as much time as would be necessary; and has likewise sanctified the sufferings of his faithful servants, when they are suddenly surprised by the impatient barbarity of their persecutors, who allow them no time for recollection, or preparation for death. Thus every circumstance of our blessed Saviour's sufferings is a source of comfort and blessing to his followers.

But now let us take a nearer view of the last mournful walk of the blessed Jesus, to his execution. By the above account we may see,

First, How, and in what manner, he was led to Golgotha.

Secondly, The company which attended him thither.

Thirdly, What happened to him by the way.

Fourthly, What our blessed Lord said, as he was led to his crucifixion.

I. As to the manner in which our blessed Saviour was led away to execution, the evangelical history informs us, that he was clothed in his own raiment, and bore his cross. That he was led away clothed in his own raiment, we are told by St. Matthew and St. Mark, in these words: 'Then the soldiers took the purple robe off from Jesus, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.' The Lord Jesus had, a little before, among other mockeries and insults he endured in Pilate's judgment-hall, been dressed up in an old purple mantle; and in this garb he was afterwards led away, and made a show of to the whole Jewish people, as a mock king. But now as he was to be carried to the place of execution, the soldiers took off from him this purple mantle, and put on him his own upper garment, that he might be the more easily known by the spectators; since it is probable, that his sacred face was

so swelled, and disfigured by blood, &c. that very few, who had even seen him before, would have known that it was Jesus of Nazareth who was led to execution. The wreath of thorns very probably remained on his head, as a public mark that the crime for which he was crucified was, That he had, in a seditious manner, according to the superscription over his head, given himself out to be the king of the Jews. The purple robe was left behind in the judgment-hall. But as this robe must probably in some parts have stuck to his body, now all bloody, and cruelly torn by scourging; the taking it off from our blessed Lord, in a rude manner, afforded new matter of sport to the insolent soldiers, as it must have caused very sensible pain to the Lord Jesus, by tearing open his stripes and wounds. So dearly did it cost the Son of God to recover for us the original garment of spotless innocence! Oh, that we may never put on our apparel, without thinking of this painful unclothing of our blessed Saviour! Certainly, such a consideration must be a powerful check to suppress in us all proud, wanton, and aspiring thoughts.

The Lord Jesus being again clothed in his own raiment, the cross was laid on his shoulders; and thus was he obliged himself to carry that heavy piece of timber on which he was to be crucified, to Golgotha. It was a custom among the Romans, that the criminal who was to be crucified, usually carried his own cross to the place of execution. But as the cross consisted of a long beam of timber, and a short transverse piece, the criminal, in carrying the cross, had his arms extended, and the transverse piece fastened to them; while the long beam was laid on his back parallel to his body, so that he dragged the lower end of it after him on the ground. To this the blessed Jesus alludes, when he forewarns Peter, that he should one day be crucified; 'When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shalt gird thee and carry thee whither thou wouldest

not,' (John xxi. 18.) And in this manner, we may suppose that Jesus was obliged to carry his cross. His extended arms were bound to the transverse beam, so that he was forced to exert all his strength in order to drag the whole cross after him. Thus, as St. John observes, he went forth bearing his cross. He had from his childhood bore it on his heart; but now he first bears it on his sacred shoulders, while pain and ignominy attend his weary steps in this mournful walk. How often must our blessed Saviour's knees, already so spent and enfeebled as to be scarce able to bear his own body, have sunk under this oppressive weight! At the same time, to drag after him that instrument of punishment on which he was to be crucified, as an aborrence and execration to all the people, was a circumstance of the most sensible reproach and ignominy. Oh, the inconceivable depth of the humiliation of the Son of God, who goes forth in the appearance of a wretched slave condemned to death, and bearing his own cross! Nay, this was the more painful to our blessed Saviour, who was the surety of mankind, as it was a peculiar punishment of sin; so that on this cross he was to become a curse for us, to be forsaken of God, and as it were to taste the bitterness of eternal death. From this circumstance of our Saviour's passion, we shall deduce the following truths:

1. The mournful walk of our blessed Lord to the place of his crucifixion, has been productive of many comforts and blessings to mankind.

Every step in this painful walk was marked with blood; but at the same time, every step dropped down comfort to our souls. Many painful, weary steps did the blessed Jesus take in his sufferings for our sake; but all would have availed us nothing, had he not determined on this last sorrowful walk. We were all under sentence of death; and this sentence could no other way be reversed, than by our Mediator's suffering himself to be led to death in our stead.

To this he has submitted to the most chearful willingness and complacency. Our blessed Lord said to Peter, 'Another shall carry thee whither thou wouldest not,' (John xxi. 18.) that is, contrary to thy natural inclination. But the Son of God was able to say to his Father, 'Lo! I come: I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart,' (Psalm xl. 7, 8.) He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. He suffered himself to be led out of the earthly Jerusalem, to procure an entrance for us into the heavenly Jerusalem. He submitted to be led as a sheep to the slaughter, that the precious souls of men might not be dragged as oxen to the slaughter by sin, the world, and the devil. The evil spirits would have dragged thee, O wretched sinner, from the grave to Judgment, and from thence to the infernal lake, according to the sentence passed on thee at the tribunal of God. But since thy Redeemer was thus voluntarily led away to his death, thou wilt never be led away by the powers of hell. For if thou dost believe in the Name of the Son of God, and givest thyself up diligently to follow him, and obey his precepts, thou shalt be enabled one day with joy to rise from the grave, and to approach the divine tribunal. Therefore let us praise and adore the Saviour of the world, who, by thus going to temporal death, hath rescued us from death eternal.

2. Nothing can make a christian more willingly and chearfully take up his cross, than the consideration that his Lord and Saviour bore the cross before him.

Who will now refuse to take upon him the cross, when he sees the Creator of the heavens bending under the weight of his cross on the earth? When a person of such a transcendent dignity, whose love to mankind was so great, sets us the example, and calls to us saying, 'Whosoever will be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me,' it would be the basest crime to refuse it, if we should be required to

bear it for his sake. Whoever seriously considers that the eternal Son of God, who upholds all things by his powerful word, who always dwelt in the regions of bliss, and had dominion over innumerable hosts of adoring angels, should humble himself so low; should put his shoulders under the ignominious cross for his sake, that he might be delivered from the curse of God, and crowned with eternal blessings; will be ashamed of his timorousness and ingratitude in avoiding the cross, will humbly implore his Redeemer, and say with courage and resolution, While I live, will I follow thee, and bear thy cross. If therefore we would have comfort in the cross of the blessed Jesus, we must necessarily resolve to enter into fellowship with him, both by the inward crucifixion of the flesh, and by outwardly taking upon us the reproach of Christ. Now as the Lord Jesus suffered internally and externally, both in soul and body; so must his followers taste of both kinds of sufferings in some degree, and bring themselves to a willing resignation to bear the cross. For these are our blessed Saviour's own words: 'Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and follow after me, cannot be my disciple,' (Luke xiv. 27.) If we are sometimes exempt from reproach and persecution, we are to shew ourselves the more faithful, by daily crucifying the old man with its affections and lusts, and by submitting to any inward sufferings, which it may please God to lay upon us.

II. We come now, in the second place, to consider the company which attended the Lord Jesus to Golgotha, or the place of a skull. A multitude of people were got together on this occasion, which generally happens even when common malefactors are carried to execution. Curiosity brought many of them; others came out of a malicious desire of entertaining their eyes with the pains and sufferings of Jesus of Nazareth. Others again were drawn to the place by different views. Nevertheless the love of God, from this attendance of the people, produced

a salutary effect. The consequence of it was this, that they returned home in a quite different temper and disposition of mind, from that with which they had set out. For when they came to see the extraordinary miracles which followed our Saviour's death, St. Luke informs us, that 'All the people who came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned,' (Luke xxiii. 48.) Thus a blessing attends our attending on the Lord Jesus, and adherence to him; though at first it may not proceed from a heart entirely free from guile.

Besides this mixed multitude of the people, there were in particular two malefactors led in company with the Lord Jesus, in order to be crucified with him. It appears from the accounts of the Evangelists, that these malefactors were murderers and robbers; crucifixion being the punishment of those crimes among the Romans. These notorious criminals, Pilate, the Roman governor, seems to have reserved for the feast of the Passover; that by executing them before an extraordinary concourse of people, who were at Jerusalem on account of the feast, a greater number might take warning by their example. It is probable that these murderers were of the number of the seditious persons, who at that time swarmed in Judea, and declared against any subjection to the Roman governor, under pretence that a Jew was to acknowledge no other sovereign but God; and possibly they might have been among those, who were taken with Barabbas in an insurrection, (Mark xv. 7.) As our blessed Lord was also accused of rebellion and high treason, the governor ordered that he should be carried to execution with the other revolters, that they who were supposed to be guilty of the same crime might together suffer the same punishment.

The Lord Jesus by descending so low, and thus debasing himself so as to be put to the level with

murderers and rebels, intended to atone for our associating.

1. With the wicked and profligate. 'Unto the wicked God sayeth, When thou sawest a thief, thou then consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers,' (Psalm l. 16, 18.) nay, with slanderers, murderers, profane swearers, drunkards, and other scandals to christianity. Thus by running with these in the same excess of riot, (1 Peter iv. 4.) when we either suffer ourselves to be carried away by other slaves of sin, or when we carry away others, and by our bad example draw them into sin; we drew on the Son of God this indignity, that he was made a companion of murderers and robbers, and was led along with them to death. May this consideration create in us an abhorrence of all wicked company.

2. Our blessed Lord, by this circumstance of his passion, intended to sanctify the sufferings of his followers. For they are often classed with heretics, rebels, and the worst of criminals; and are looked upon as people who deserve to be condemned to suffer the same punishment.

3. Our blessed Saviour by this intended to give us an intimation, how we ought to lead out our old man to be crucified with him. We have in us two notorious malefactors, who are guilty of all manner of disobedience and rebellion against the Divine Majesty, and transgress all his commands. If we would know them, they are presumptuous carnal reason, which refuses to submit itself to divine revelation, and our preverse self-will, which spurns at the yoke of Christ. Let us therefore without delay seize these two criminals, bind them, and fasten them to the cross of Christ. If we are desirous of inward peace and tranquillity, we must not spare these rebels from which all our disturbances arise; and, if we would reap true comfort from the crucifixion of Christ, we must chearfully resolve to crucify those corruptions in us, that brought him to the cross.

III. We come now to consider what happened to the Lord Jesus by the way to his crucifixion. In general, the treatment he met with was very different from that which he had experienced six days before, at his public entrance into Jerusalem. He then entered the city amidst the joyful acclamations and applauding Hosanna's of the people. Then the popular cry was, 'Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.' On the contrary, curses, insults, mockeries, and bitter sarcasms, now pursued the blessed Jesus as he went forth to Golgotha. For when Christ, or his members, are to suffer, every one insults, reviles, and speaks evil of them. Probably, many indignities were offered our blessed Lord by the way, which are passed over in silence by the Evangelists. However, they make mention of two particular incidents, which happened while our Saviour walked to the place of execution; and these are, First, That he was eased of the weight of his cross, and Secondly, That he was publicly lamented by the compassionate women of Jerusalem.

First, Jesus meets with some ease from the heavy load, with which he was oppressed; the cross, which he dragged along with so much difficulty, being taken from him, and laid on another. The enemies of our blessed Lord little intended, indeed, to shew him any kindness by taking the cross from him: On the contrary, their intention was, 1. To hurry on the faster to Mount Golgotha; for as Jesus, by reason of his weakness and fatigue, moved very slowly, the Jews were out of patience till the sentence of death was finally executed on him. 2. To reserve our blessed Lord for acuter pangs and greater tortures; for they were apprehensive that he might faint by the way, and die under their hands; which would not have been near so satisfactory to them as to see him, nailed to and bleeding on the cross. Therefore perceiving that his strength was exhausted by watchings, hunger, fatigue, and loss of blood, they took the burden

from Jesus, that he might not sink under it. But the Heavenly Father so directed this circumstance, as to procure some alleviation to his Son thus harrassed, and sinking under the weight of his miseries.

Our blessed Saviour had himself carried the cross from the hall of judgment to the city gate; but when they came without the gate, the soldiers seeing that Jesus was by no means able to drag his cumbersome load up the hill, they looked out for a proper person to carry it to the destined place, with the desired expedition.

By the particular direction of God, there happened to pass by a man called Simon, a native of Cyrene, a city of Libia, which, though it was above a thousand miles distant from Jerusalem, was full of Jews who had also a synagogue there. This man, possibly, might be possessed of some farm without the city, and was coming from it to Jerusalem, in order to perform his devotions in the temple. This Simon was, in all appearance, a secret disciple of the Lord Jesus; and seeing him sink under the load of the cross, and dragging it along with great difficulty, he either by words or gesture expressed some compassion for him. This was a sufficient provocation to the insolent soldiers to lay hold of Simon, and to fasten the cross on his back. Thus he was compelled to follow the Lord Jesus, and to carry the cross after him, perhaps by the way of ridicule, as he was supposed to be one of Christ's disciples. Had he been an unrelenting Jew, and an enemy to Christ and his doctrine, he would have thrown down the cross at their feet. He would have railed against Jesus, and excused himself from performing this ignominious office; nay, the chief Priests would have interceded for him, to have him set at liberty, and intreated the soldiers not to make a laughing stock of one of their fellow-citizens. But as he was probably a disciple of Christ, he patiently submitted to be mocked and ridiculed with his Lord and Saviour. At first, in-

deed, he was a little discomposed, and thought it a great hardship to be treated so scandalously; but, on perceiving the uncommon patience and mildness of the blessed Jesus, who was hurried on before him by the rude multitude, he learned of Christ to possess his soul in patience, and quietly submitted to let them do what they pleased with him. This Simon of Cyrene here seems, as it were, to supply the place of Simon Peter, who had made sanguine promise that he would follow his master, and go with him to death; (John xiii. 37.) but, instead of making good his words, had betaken himself to flight along with the other disciples. Therefore the wise providence of God seems to have provided another Simon to bear Christ company, when he was going to suffer death.

The second particular incident, which happened while our blessed Saviour walked to the place of execution, was a public testimony of pity and compassion. A great company of women, some of whom were inhabitants of Jerusalem, others had followed Jesus from Galilee, accompanied him bewailing and lamenting him (Luke xxiii. 27. 49.) Probably, in some of them this was only the effect of a humane, sympathetic feeling, which generally excites a natural compassion to malefactors when they are carried to execution, as they are partakers of one common nature with us. In others this natural tenderness might be mixed with self-love; for they were concerned, that a person who had performed such surprising miracles, who had healed the sick, the lame and the blind, and was their physician and helper in all their distresses, should be put to such a painful and ignominious death. At the same time, this compassion in some few of them, may be supposed to have its rise from pure and more disinterested motives. Be this as it will, it shewed itself outwardly in gestures of passionate grief; for they beat their breasts, wrung their hands, wept, and lamented.

These expressions of sorrow in the women, denoted that they were ignorant of the mystery of the cross, and had but a weak faith. Had they known the counsel of God with regard to the sufferings of his Son; had they been convinced, that Jesus went to death not by compulsion, but willingly; and that he should again soon release himself from its tyranny by a glorious resurrection, they would not have been seen to beat their breasts, lament and bewail him. But in their hearts, he was accounted as one dead; and they concluded that all the hopes of the redemption of Israel were buried in his grave. However, these circumstances were also directed by the wise and sacred counsel of God. These tears of the spectators bore witness to the innocence of the blessed Jesus, which Pilate had before so often acknowledged. These tears publicly accused his iniquitous judges of injustice, and openly condemned the sentence of death which they had pronounced on him. These tears were some of the outward expressions of grief, due to the memory of the King of Israel. (2 Sam. i. 24. 2 Chron. xxxii. 33. xxxv. 25.) These tears were preludes to the accomplishment of the prophecy of Zachariah, (chap. xii. 10, 14.) who declares, that all the women of the tribes of Israel should one day mourn for the Messiah. Lastly, by this incident the beginning and the end of our Saviour's sufferings were made to harmonize with each other. He, at whose birth the mothers of Bethlehem (Jer. xxxi. 15.) mourned and wept for their children, (which was a type of this lamentation for the death of the Messiah) is now, at his death, mourned and lamented by the mothers of Jerusalem. From these circumstances we shall deduce the following truths:

1. God is so gracious, that he never suffers us to be oppressed beyond what we are able to bear; but, when it is most necessary, he provides some relief.

Thus it happened to the blessed Jesus, in the instance before us. When his human strength was so

exhausted, so that he was quite unable to bear his cross, God so directed contingencies, that he was eased of its oppressive weight. Thus will it be with every sincere disciple, who with patience and resignation bears the cross of Christ. His faithful and compassionate Saviour, who from his own experience knows, what it is for human nature to be loaded beyond its strength so as to sink under its burden, will have mercy on him; will prevent him from being oppressed beyond his strength; will lighten the burden under which he groans, and support him with his all sustaining hand. If it is enjoined in the Divine law, that even an ass shall not lie under the weight of his burden, but that he should be helped up. (Exodus xxiii. 5.) much more will our blessed Lord, in his tender love, hold out his hand to those who bear his cross, and support those who are fainting under it. Of this timely relief all the followers of Christ may make themselves sure. Let us therefore chearfully take up that burden, which love will render easy and light; besides, the sufferings of the present time are not to be compared to the glory reserved for him, who holdeth out to the end.

2. God overlooks our natural aversion to sufferings, if we do not wilfully indulge it to excess.

It is not improbable that Simon the Cyrenian at first made some opposition; for they compelled him to bear the cross of Christ. This is an emblem of the timorous backwardness of human nature in taking up the cross, and its fondness for ease, conveniency, and worldly esteem. Alas! we daily shew our desire to be excused from bearing the cross, and thereby confirm the observation of St. Paul, (Heb. xii. 11.) 'That no chastening, for the present, is joyous, but grievous to us.' How willing soever the spirit may be, the flesh is generally weak; especially when the cross comes so unexpectedly, as it did here on Simon. But blessed be God, who has compassion on the infirmities of his children, and for Christ's sake, will forgive

them these natural motions of self-love, if they do but earnestly strive against them, and pray to him for more willingness under persecutions and sufferings. Let us therefore not only imitate Simon, in his reluctancy at first to take up the cross; but let us, after his example, derive strength from the fulness of Christ to overcome that reluctancy. For this man, by seeing the astonishing gentleness of Jesus Christ, who suffered himself to be led like a lamb to the slaughter, overcame the reluctant motions of nature; and afterwards held the reproach of Christ so dear, that by his means his two sons Alexander and Rufus became disciples of Jesus Christ, (Rom. xvi. 13.)

3. To do or suffer any thing for Christ's sake will perpetuate a man's name among the congregations of the saints.

Thus by Simon's bearing our Saviour's cross, his name has been transmitted down to this day; so that wherever the gospel of Christ is known, mention is made of him. The same effect has the cross with regard to all those who, bear it in the fellowship of Christ, with patience, resignation, and joy. How honourable is it to the memory of a deceased christian, when one can glory, with truth, that he bore the yoke of Christ, and though dead, yet still liveth.—This is the blessed and glorious path to true fame, and immortal reputation in the congregation of the saints; whereas all the other false encomiums, and renowned titles, with which the world emblazons the memmory of those who have signalized themselves in its service, at length go out in smoke and stench.

IV. In the last place, we are to consider what our blessed Saviour said as he was led to his crucifixion. Far from being struck dumb with terror and dejection, he performed this painful ignominious walk with a composed presence of mind. Undoubtedly he conversed more in silence with his Heavenly Father, than with men: However, he opened his mouth, and made known the thoughts of his heart to the latter in very

remarkable words, which are recorded by St. Luke. No murmuring against his Father's decree escaped his lips, nor any imprecations, menaces, or invectives against his enemies; but if he opened his mouth on this occasion, it was to preach repentance. The cross being taken from our blessed Lord, and laid on Simon's shoulders, he made use of this interval of ease for speaking to the women that followed lamenting and bewailing him, and in their persons to the whole Jewish nation, such things as belonged to their peace. Those remarkable words of the blessed Jesus and the meaning of them, will be the subject of the following Consideration.

THE PRAYER.

O FAITHFUL Saviour, praised be thy name, who didst suffer thyself to be led away to death, that we might have entrance into life. We bless thee for sanctifying, in the person of Simon, the bearing of the cross after thee, and taking away the reproach and curse from our cross in bearing it thyself. Make us, we beseech thee, ready and willing to follow thee our leader, wheresoever thou goest. Teach us to set a proper value on the fellowship of thy sufferings, and, in love to bear the burdens of others, that we may fulfil the law of Christ. Grant this for thy name sake, and bless for our edification those circumstances of thy meritorious passion, which we have now considered. Amen.

CONSIDERATION II.

THE LAST PENITENTIAL SERMON OF THE LORD JESUS; AS IT WAS EXPLAINED IN A DISCOURSE, PREACHED ON A DAY OF PUBLIC HUMILIATION, IN THE YEAR 1725.

MAY the blessed Jesus, who himself preached repentance, and ordered that repentance should be

preached in his name; for the sake of his infinite love, bless the consideration of this his last penitential sermon to all our hearts! Amen.

Dearly Beloved in the Lord,

PENITENTIAL sermons have ever been in use from the beginning of the world. The first discourse of this kind was preached by God himself in Paradise, when he represented to our first parents, after the fall, their sin and transgression: when he recommended to them a constant enmity against satan and his works, and, at the same time, a lively faith in the promised seed of the woman, (Gen. iii. 9—19.) After this, God was pleased to expostulate with Cain, when he pined with envy and hatred against his brother Abel, in the following words which are a kind of penitential sermon: 'Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door,' (Gen. iv. 6, 7.) What was thus begun by God himself, the great pattern of perfection, his faithful servants have continued in all succeeding ages. The devout patriarchs who lived before the deluge, and particularly Enos, Enoch, and Noah, were preachers of repentance and righteousness; setting forth to the inhabitants of the antedeluvian world their heinous sins, and making known the Divine judgments which should come upon them.

After the deluge, which, more than any penitential sermon, manifested the wrath of God from heaven against all the wicked ways of men, God began to preach repentance to those who survived, in which he represents that all the thoughts and imaginations of man's heart are evil from his youth; however, for the sake of another person, who was to bear and expiate the sin and curse, he was at the same time pleased graciously to promise, no more to curse the earth, nor to destroy it by a new deluge, (Gen. viii. 21.) Since that remarkable æra, God has from time to

time raised up other faithful witnesses, to preach unto men the necessity of repentance and conversion to the living God, and of faith in the promised Messiah. This was the purport of the discourses of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, when, at the altars which they had set up in several places, 'they called upon the name of the Lord,' (Gen. xii. 8.) This was the employment of Moses, Samuel, and all the other prophets. This was the office of John the Baptist and all the apostles, whom we find continually preaching repentance, and forgiveness of sins,' (Luke xxiv. 47. Acts xx. 21.)

But among all the penitential sermons inserted in the holy scriptures, none deserve greater attention than those of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, at the commencement and conclusion of his ministerial office, both on the account of the dignity of the speaker, and the importance of the subject. And as we now propose to consider the last penitential sermon delivered by the great author of our religion, in the days of his humiliation; let us collect our thoughts, lift up our hearts to God, and pray unto him, that he will be pleased to bless this Consideration to the edification and salvation of our souls.

THE TEXT.—Luke xxiii. 27—31.

'AND there followed him a great company of people and of women who also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them, said, daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me; but for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in which they shall say, blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps that never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, fall on us, and to the hills, cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?'

These words are the last penitential sermon of the Lord Jesus; in which we shall consider,

First, The true sense and meaning of the words.

Secondly, The use and application of them.

I. This last penitential sermon of the Son of God was directed to the daughters of Jerusalem, *i. e.* the women who lived at Jerusalem, or those who, with respect to the Jewish worship, acknowledged it as the holy city, and the mother of them all. These women, amidst a prodigious multitude of people, now accompanied our blessed Lord to his crucifixion: For the Evangelist observes, that a great multitude of people followed the blessed Jesus when he was led forth to Mount Golgotha; and among these probably were many foreign Jews and proselytes, who were at this time assembled from all parts of the world at Jerusalem, on account of the passover. The Lord Jesus in this instance also submitted to be led to death like any common criminal; it being customary for the people to flock together, when a malefactor is to be carried to his execution. But on such occasions, how few of the spectators reflect, that they have within them the seeds of that depravity which, in these unhappy objects, broke out into such enormous crimes; or humbly praise God who has preserved them from such sins; or offer up a compassionate prayer for the criminals? Most of them are usually drawn thither, merely to gratify an idle curiosity; and much the greater part of the multitude, which followed Christ to Golgotha, cannot be supposed to have had any better motive.

But among this concourse of people were also many women, some of whom had followed Jesus from Galilee, and others lived at Jerusalem. The Evangelist observes, that these women bewailed and lamented Jesus as he went along. These words in the original signify, that they not only shed tears, but expressed their grief by loud lamentations, and passionate gestures.

In most of these women, this mourning and bewailing possibly proceeded only from a mere natural com-

passion. They were grieved that a great prophet, and so good a man, who had never done the least injury to any one, but, on the contrary, went about doing good, and healing all kinds of diseases, should suffer such an ignominious and painful death. Their concern was increased by the dismal sight of this mournful spectacle, which might have raised compassion not only in the humane, but even in the hardest heart. They saw in our blessed Saviour's face the bloody marks of the cruel indignities he had suffered in Pilate's judgment-hall; that sacred head having been deplorably abused by the blows of the inhuman soldiers, and by the wreath of thorns which had been forced into his temples. They likewise now beheld with their own eyes the barbarity of the Roman soldiers, which still raged against our blessed Saviour. Now it was customary among the Romans to torment those who were to be crucified, as they went to the place of execution, by pushing them to and fro, beating them with their fists and clubs, and sometimes strewing sharp stones and nails under their naked feet, and with all possible violence forcing them to walk over them. As this was the usual way of treating those criminals, who were to suffer death on the cross, it is hardly to be supposed that the soldiers, who hitherto had used the sacred person of Christ with the most cruel insolence, would in the least abate of their rigour on this occasion. Besides all this, the heavy burden of the cross must have been very painful to our blessed Saviour, who was spent with fatigue, and had his shoulders and back all over lacerated by the scourges. So moving a sight might well raise in these women a sensible compassion, which vented itself in tears, lamentations, wringing of the hands, beating the breast, and other outward signs of grief.

Now it was this compassionate concern that gave occasion to this penitential sermon; for our blessed Saviour, turning about to these women, as he had the night before to Peter after his fall, with looks full of

piety and compassion, addressed them thus: 'Weep not for me, ye daughters of Jerusalem, but weep for yourselves, and for your children, &c.' Thus our blessed Lord, indeed, directs these words to the women; but at the same time, in their person, to the whole house of Israel, as the rest of the multitude were within hearing. To this end, he exalted his voice, and spoke with a particular emphasis, as the prophets usually did in their denunciations of God's approaching judgments.

These words of our Saviour contain the following particulars.

1. An admonition to these women concerning their lamentations.

2. A denunciation of the approaching divine judgments.

3. An information of the true cause of those judgments.

1. In the admonition to the women concerning their lamentations, our blessed Saviour forbids them to shed their tears for him, and recommends to them, to weep for themselves, and for their children. The prohibition is expressed in these words: 'Weep not for me!' Not that he absolutely blames their tears, which are rather to be esteemed a public testimony of his innocence; and deserved the more regard, since by the Jewish laws persons condemned to death by the Sanhedrim were not to be publicly lamented.—But such was the grief of these women, that they were not afraid, by their tears, to condemn the capital sentence passed by the chief Priests and Scribes, as a most unjust proceeding. However, we do not read that they was punished by the great council, or insulted by the populace, on this account; which would certainly have been the case, had not these feeble witnesses of our Saviour's innocence been protected by a superior power.

But why should our blessed Lord forbid these women to weep for him? It was, first, because he per-

ceived that these tears sprung from a wrong scource. These compassionate daughters of Jerusalem only looked on Christ's outward wounds, pains, and ignominy, which excited in them a natural sympathetic feelings; but they had no idea of the secret council of God, and the true cause of all the sufferings that Jesus endured. They were not sensible that the sins of the world, and consequently their own sins, were to be laid on the head of this sacred victim; that he was dragging them up to the place of execution; and that he was to offer them in his body on the cross, and thus publicly make an effectual atonement for, and do them away. Secondly, he forbids this weeping, because he looks upon himself in his present circumstances as one that did not deserve any compassion. God himself, as it were, hid his face from his only Son, who was then our Mediator, and loaded with the sins of the whole world. As a dejected sinner, whose conscience is awakened, accounts himself unworthy of every consolation, and of all the affections shewn to him by others; so likewise our Redeemer, being, by the imputations of the sins of the world, made a curse and expiatory sacrifice, accounts himself unworthy to receive any alleviation of his grief from the compassion of others. Thirdly, He forbids them to lament, because he knew that his short transitory sufferings would produce such noble fruits, and conduce to the glory of God, and the eternal salvation of mankind; so that there was much greater reason for joy than sorrow on this occasion.

On the other hand, the blessed Jesus advises them to weep for themselves, and for their children. In this exhortation, he alludes to these words, which the people had uttered with great vehemence, a little before, at the instigation of the chief Priests and Elders: 'His blood be upon us, and on our children' (Matt. xxvii. 25.) Weep for yourselves! As if our blessed Lord had said, If you are for lamenting and shedding

tears, weep for YOURSELVES, not only for your sins which are the cause of my pains, &c. but likewise for the dreadful calamities, which some of you shall live to see; for many afflictions and trials are coming on you, and it behoves you betimes to arm yourselves against them with prayers and tears. Weep for your CHILDREN, since on them the judgments of obduracy and unbelief shall come; for they shall live to see the days of the unparelleled miseries of the Jewish people during the siege of Jerusalem, and shall perish in them. Alas! did you but know what dreadful judgments of God, both spiritual and temporal, are now hovering over the heads of your children, and with what rigour the divine vengeance will require my blood at your hands, you would certainly spare those tears which you now shed for me, to deplore the wretchedness of your unhappy descendants; for on denouncing their calamities, a few days ago, I myself could not refrain from weeping (Luke xix. 41.) Upon this follows,

2. A denunciation of the approaching divine judgments, which should have been the motives for the daughters of Jerusalem, to weep for themselves and for their children: 'For behold the days are coming, in which they shall say, blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare and the paps that never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us! and to the hills, cover us!'

In these words, our dying Saviour fortels the destruction of Jerusalem, and the utter devastation of Judea, by the Romans; which he had before predicted at different times, and upon several occasions.—'Behold saith our blessed Lord, your house is left unto you desolate, (Luke xiii. 35.) For the day shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee around, and keep thee in on every side; and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee: And they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another, (Luke

xix. 43, 44.) O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stoneth them who are sent unto thee! how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not? Behold, your house is left unto you desolate, (Matt. xxiii. 37, 38.) And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple; and the disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the Temple. And Jesus said unto them, see ye not all these things? Verily, I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another, which shall not be thrown down,' (Matt. xxiv. 1, 2.) And now, a few hours before his death, Jesus denounces these woes for the last time. In order to set before the Jews the greatness of the misery which should come on their children, in a clearer and more emphatical manner, he makes use of two figurative expressions, borrowed from the writings of the prophets.

In the first place, our blessed Saviour says, 'Behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck.' Now the barrenness of women was accounted by the Jews a part of the Divine curse, and consequently an extreme disgrace. Hence Rachel in the old Testament, and Elizabeth in the new, (Gen. xxx. 23. Luke i. 25.) when they grew pregnant, praised God for having taken away their reproach. On the other hand, fecundity was looked upon as a singular honour, and a mark of the Divine favour. When Christ therefore here declares that the time was coming, when barren women would be accounted much happier than those who had borne and suckled many children, he gives the Jews to understand, that a terrible day of vengeance was approaching; which would be more especially so to fathers and mothers of families, whose personal calamities would be doubled by the misery of their children. Here our blessed

Lord alludes to the following passage of the Prophet Hosea, who, when he had a view in the spirit of the misery of the ten tribes under the Assyrian captivity, cries out, 'Give them, O Lord, a miscarrying womb, and dry breasts,' (Hosea ix. 14.) *i. e.* rather give them no offspring, than suffer them to live to be a cause of so much sorrow to their parents. Hence our blessed Saviour, before, denounced this woe to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: 'Woe unto them that are with child, and unto them that give suck in those days,' (Matt. xxiv. 19.) namely, when flight will be the only means of safety, and such persons will be less fit for it than others. Those unhappy women would therefore feel all the woes and calamities of the siege of Jerusalem; and that in a double portion, on account of their beloved offspring.

This prediction was abundantly verified by the melancholy event. For in less than forty years after this woe was denounced, this day of vengeance came attended with all its terrors on the Jewish people. Among other miseries, which the inhabitants of Jerusalem suffered during the siege, they were oppressed with such an intolerable famine, that some of the most tender mothers eat their own children. Other unhappy mothers saw their offspring making the most deplorable lamentations, pining away for hunger, dying of the pestilence, stabbed, cut to pieces, or dashed against the stones by the Roman soldiers before their eyes. Thus the circumstances of the childless being in several respects more tolerable, than of those who had a numerous offspring; how many mothers must have passionately wished, that they had never borne or suckled children!

In the next place, our blessed Lord adds, 'then will they begin to say to the mountains, fall on us! and to the hills, cover us!' Christ here alludes to another passage of the Prophet Hosea, who gives a pathetic representation of the wretchedness of the ten Tribes in the Assyrian captivity, in these words,

'and they shall say to the mountains, cover us! and to the hills, fall on us!' (Hosea x. 8.) Thus the Prophet Isaiah, in his description of the deplorable siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, says, 'and they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for the fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his Majesty' (Isaiah ii. 29.) In these words, borrowed from the prophetic writings, the Lord Jesus here foretels the calamities which Jerusalem should endure, when besieged by the Romans; and thereby gives the Jews to understand, that their misery and affliction would be so great when the Romans should invest their city, that many families of distinction leaving their splendid houses, would betake themselves with their wives and children to the most lonely caves of the mountains, in order to avoid the cruelty of the Roman army; that hunger and cold would render those subterraneous retreats so insupportable to them, that they should ardently long for death; and, in their misery and despair, wish the mountains would fall on them, and be their grave.

This prophecy likewise, whether the words be taken in a literal or figurative sense, was fully accomplished. For Josephus informs us, that on the approach of the Roman army, the Jews fled in crouds to the mountains and hills, and wandered about or concealed themselves in caves, where, in all probability, most of them must have perished with hunger, while the rest, being weary of such a miserable life, a thousand times ardently wished for death. But those who survived the destruction of Jerusalem were dispersed into all countries, and obliged to seek refuge among other nations, and to request of them that they might be, as it were covered by them; being persecuted every where by the wrath of God and of the Lamb. These heavy judgments the son of God here publicly denounces, that the whole Jewish nation might be awakened to repentance, be rouzed from their lethargic security, and be moved by a true conversion to

God, to avert his heavy wrath which otherwise must be a necessary consequence of their enormous transgressions. For this end,

3. He acquaints them with the true cause of such terrible judgments, by drawing the following inference: 'for if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?' our blessed Lord in these words, which are taken from the prophet Ezekiel (Chap. xx. 47. xxii. 3.) compares himself to a green, *i. e.* sappy and fruitful tree. Thus he is likewise called in the Revelation of St. John, 'the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God,' (Chap. ii. 7.) On the other hand, he compares the impenitent Jews to dry and unfruitful trees, without any sap of the spiritual life, who, consequently, could bring forth no fruit of repentance and grace.

Hence it appears, that the primary cause of their approaching calamity was of a twofold nature. First, they rejected, and crucified the Messiah, to which our Saviour alludes in these words, 'if they do these things in a green tree;' if they thus deal with me, who am entirely innocent of all the crimes laid to my charge. This was indeed the capital sin of the Jewish nation. They had already embrued their hands in the blood of many of the Prophets. But now they filled up the measure of their iniquities, by putting to death the son of God himself. For by their repeated clamours, they insisted in their savage fury, that he should be crucified; and when the Pagan judge himself bore witness that he was an innocent and a just person, they rather chose that the divine vengeance should pursue their latest posterity, than that he should be suffered to live.

The second cause of the calamities was their obstinate impenitence; for they wantonly abused the patience and long-suffering of God, and, notwithstanding all the labours of John the Baptist, of Christ himself, and his apostles, continued the same dead and unfruitful trees as they were before. Therefore,

they could expect nothing else at last, but the execution of that sentence, which Christ had long since denounced against them in a parable, viz. 'cut down [the barren fig-tree] why cumbereth it the ground? (Luke xiii. 7.) John the Baptist had before, in God's name, declared to the Jews the same truth, in these words, 'and now also the axe is laid to the root of the trees: therefore every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the fire.'

Moreover the blessed Jesus by these words, as it were, called upon the Jewish people to look on his sufferings as in a mirror, which represented to them the wrath that should come on their city and nation. As if our blessed Lord had said, a green tree has a kind of power in itself, by which it resists the fire; whereas a dry tree is soon consumed by the flames, without making any opposition. Thus if I, who am by nature a green and fruitful tree, am dried up by the fire of God's displeasure, on account of the sins of others which are imputed to me; if I am loaded with a curse, and as it were rooted out from the land of the living, in a most painful manner; much more will the unbelieving Jews, who are dead and barren trees, without any sap or life of the spirit, and even thorny briars and sons of Belial, be seized by the divine wrath, and consumed by temporal and eternal judgments on account of their own sins, if they persevere in their impenitence.

Now these words are still more remarkable on the following account. The Jews, by their repeated clamours, had prevailed on the Roman governor to crucify Christ the Green Tree, and hang him as a curse on a dry tree; but our Saviour intimates, that the time would come, when the Jews, who where dry trees, should be hanged on green trees. For when the Jews, who were besieged in Jerusalem by the Romans, were unable to hold out any longer against the miseries which raged within the city, they went out of Jerusalem in multitudes to surrender them-

selves prisoners. Now the number of such deserters being very great, Titus the Roman general ordered them to be executed in a most dreadful manner. For above five hundred of them, after they had been tortured and scourged, were crucified, for several days successively before the city walls, in all manner of frightful postures. According to Josephus, such vast numbers of Jews perished in this manner, that at length there was neither room to erect the crosses near the walls, nor a sufficient number of crosses for the condemned. Thus the divine retaliation manifested itself; for God permitted these dry barren trees to suffer the same barbarous treatment, which the green tree had met with from them.

II. Having thus illustrated the true sense and meaning of these words of the Lord Jesus, let us, in the next place, turn our thoughts to a salutary application of them, and consider the advantages which both impenitent and penitent souls may derive from them.

Among the impenitent we may reckon those who impiously despise the covenant of grace, and live in a total neglect of God's ordinances, and particularly the sacrament of the Lord's supper; those who live in the open violation of the divine laws, and commit all the works of darkness; those who are given to lasciviousness, gluttony, and drunkenness; and those who live in enmity, and bear an irreconcilable hatred to their neighbours. Concerning these and the like scandals of the christain name, who, alas, are too numerous, the spirit of God has declared by St. Paul (Gal. v. 19.) that while they continue in such a state, they shall not inherit the kingdom of God

Moreover, to this unhappy class likewise belong all those who have not, with their whole hearts, conceived such a hatred against every sin, that they would rather suffer death, than commit any deliberate offence. But much more justly may they be numbered among the impenitent, who are enamoured

with sin, and either walk like brute beasts, according to the instigations of their wicked lusts; or, instead of the word of God, regulate their lives by the pattern of the polite world, as it is called; and imitate the ill example set them in all the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, whatever their religious sentiments may be; whether they are utterly ignorant of the truths of religion, or have a knowledge of them attended with conviction. Oh that every one, at this description, would ask himself, 'Lord is it I?' And if his conscience should accuse him, may he be the more ardently desirous of learning, how he shall benefit himself by this last penitential sermon of our blessed Lord.

In the first place, examine thyself, whether thou hast placed the whole of thy religion in railing against Judas, the chief Priests, and their officers, against Pilate and his soldiers, and in execrating their impiety; and, on the other hand, in expressing a natural compassion for Christ, as an innocent and just man, &c. Many there are who, from such natural emotions, conclude themselves to be good Christians, and that their hearts are well disposed towards their Saviour; whereas they never gave any real proofs of their love towards him or his members. But notwithstanding all these symptoms, they are only hypocrites, and often enemies to the cross of Christ. Beware therefore, that thou do not account these as infallible marks of thy state of grace; for as mere nature, especially in persons of a delicate constitution and tender disposition, often produces such effects, to be accounted a true disciple of Jesus Christ, thou must do something more.

Rather be awakened by these words of Christ: 'Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves!' Turn thine eyes on thyself, and, in humble prayer to God, request the assistance of the Divine light, in order to search the inmost recesses of thy heart. And be assured, that if thou dost not flatter, nor wilfully deceive

thyself, thou wilt have great cause to weep for thyself and thy numberless sins. If God is pleased to grant thee a thorough insight into thy deep guilt, thou wilt not be able to look on thyself otherwise than as a dry, sapless, dead, and barren tree, without the least fruit of the spirit which may be pleasing to God, and beneficial to thy neighbour; or, at most, with only a few leaves of an external profession of the truth, and observance of the outward worship, as a covering to thy reproach and nakedness. If, under the conviction of thy natural sterility and indisposition for any thing that is good, thou wilt lift up thine eyes, and examine the dire threatenings of the law, and there find how the divine justice threatens all dry and barren trees with the last fatal stroke; the voice, which says cut it down, why cumbreth it the ground? will throw thy conscience into the utmost consternation.

This terror will also be greatly increased by reflecting, how the justice of God hath, on account of imputed sin, proceeded with Jesus Christ, the green tree of life. Behold, God has not spared his own son, but punished in him, with the greatest severity, the sins of the world, which he had consented should be imputed to him; and caused him to discharge to the utmost farthing those debts, for which he had become a security. No favour was shewn him, though he was the son of God. For as he had taken on himself the whole burden of sin; so was he likewise obliged to bear the whole weight of God's displeasure. Alas! how did he totter under the enormous load! how did he tremble and despond when he was to drink the cup, which was full of bitter sufferings! how, instead of sweat, did the sanguine streams issue from his sacred body, and run down to the ground! how was he reviled, insulted, abused, mocked, and spurned, as if he had been the most impious wretch, by the merciless hands of men! The meanest servant was allowed to treat him with contempt. At length, after he had tasted the bitterness

of the most painful sufferings, he was lifted up (as a curse) betwixt heaven and earth, and gave up the ghost in the greatest disgrace and ignominy. When thou dost seriously consider, O man, how thy sins have brought all those sufferings on him, thy awakened and terrified conscience will soon teach thee to make this inference, 'If they do these thing in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?' thou wilt resemble a malefactor standing before his judge to hear the sentence of death pronounced against him. Thou wilt feel something of that anguish of mind, which Christ describes in these words; 'then will they begin to say to the mountains, fall on us! and to the hills, cover us!' thou wilt be ready, for shame and dread of the offending deity, to hide thyself, if it were possible, from his presence, in dens and caves of the earth; being convinced that a wretch, who has crucified the son of God, is not worthy to walk on the earth, or behold the light of the sun. This is indeed the legal use of Christ's sufferings, when, as a mirror of sin and wrath, they terrify the conscience, and occasion an unspeakable anguish of mind. But, according to our present situation, we must begin with this method of considering them. Man naturally enjoys himself in full security, though he is the object of God's displeasure. He says, I have peace; I am in no danger, even when divine vengeance watches him like a lion. But God has in scripture shewn many severe examples of his wrath against impenitent sinners. The first world was drowned by the waters of the deluge. On Sodom and Gomorrah he rained down fire from heaven. Corah's impious adherents were swallowed up alive by the earth. Lastly, Jerusalem, which he permitted to be rased to the very ground, proclaims the divine Justice, and teaches us that the Lord is greatly to be feared. The heavy judgments which God poured on the Jews, should be a parricular admonition, calling out to us, 'behold the severity of the

Lord to those who are fallen!' If God has not spared the natural branches, what assurance have we that he will spare us? (Rom. xi. 21, 22.) But never has God so awfully manifested his great anger against sin, as in the sufferings of his beloved Son; there, O sinner, thy conscience must first be awakened, and filled with terror and anxiety at this affecting consideration. "This terror, says the pious Luther, must arise from the consideration of the severe displeasure of God against sin, and his rigour in punishing sinners; since he would not acquit his own beloved Son, to whom the sins of the world were imputed, without such a severe expiation. What will be done to actual sinners, if the beloved Child is thus chastised? Inexpressible must be that guilt, which requires a person of such transcendent dignity for a satisfaction." Happy is he, who, from the sufferings of Christ, is filled with a salutary dread! Happy is he, who is induced thereby to weep for his sins, and to apply to God for grace and forgiveness. Such a one will have no occasion, in the day of wrath, to call on the mountains and rocks to fall on him, and hide him from the face of him who sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, (Rev. vi. 15, 16, 17.)

Now he that is thus awakened from his carnal security, and has a settled fear of the wrath of God, ought further to know the advantage, which a penitent soul may derive from this penitential sermon of our blessed Lord.

A penitent person is one, who from his heart is terrified at his own depravity, and the heavy wrath of God which he has deserved by his sins; who acknowledges himself a dry and unfruitful tree, fit only for the fire; who inwardly abhors and detests all sin, which caused the green tree of life to be so ignominiously and barbarously treated; who now makes it his ultimate wish that the sentence of God to cut it down may be reversed, and that, by the vital juice of the true vine, he may be made a vegitating, fruitful, and flourishing tree.

If this, O man, be the state of thy mind, then deeply lay to heart this thy Saviour's last penitential sermon. Turn unto him, and represent to thyself thy merciful Redeemer turning to thee, and, with a look of the tenderest affection, addressing himself to thee in these or the like words: "Weep not for me, thou poor compassionate sinner; for so glorious will be the consequences of my bitter sufferings, that thou hast greater cause thankfully to praise God for them. I have discharged the debt of thy sins; I have abolished the curse denounced against them; I have inclined the heart of God to look upon thee with affectionate love; finally, I have obtained eternal life and salvation for thee. The severe punishment which thou didst deserve I have borne, that thou mayest have peace, and be healed by my wounds. Therefore weep not for me! For thyself, indeed, mayest thou well weep; since thou hast brought innumerable pains and indignities on me, by thy sins. But all this I forgive thee from the bottom of my heart. It was of my own good will, that I freely took upon me thy sins, and the punishment that was due to them. I am the Lamb of God that taketh away thy sins, and I am the messenger of the covenant that bringeth thee pardon and grace from my Heavenly Father. My blood does not cry for vengeance like that of Abel: On the contrary, it continually intercedes for reconciliation between God and man. It does not rend the heavens with a noise of thunder; but rather restrains the instruments of the Divine vengeance, and restores peace, friendship, and tranquility. Therefore wipe thy overflowing eyes: thou hast wept enough for thyself. I have counted thy tears, and put them into my bottle. Thy mother has no cause to wish that she had never bore thee; For by my merit I have removed the sentence of condemnation denounced against thee at thy birth, and by my painful death, I have renewed thee to an eternal life. Art thou for seeking safety among the rocks? I will hide thee from

the wrath of God, and by my mediation thou shalt be in perfect security. Art thou afraid of being hewn down as a dry and barren tree, and therefore dreadest the axe of God's wrath? know that I have suffered its stroke in thy stead. I have permitted myself to be rooted out of the land of the living, that thou mightest be spared. My merit shall protect thy penitent soul against it, and my Spirit, which I shall pour upon thee, shall make thee green and flourishing; so that thou shalt be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth its fruit in its season. The name of my Father shall be glorified in thy wonderful fertility, and, after standing thy due time in the garden of my church on earth, I will transplant thee to my heavenly paradise, and place thee by the crystal stream which issues from my throne: There shalt thou flourish in everlasting bloom and verdure, and thy leaf shall never fade."

THE PRAYER.

Now, O faithful Saviour, thanks be to thee for this thy last penitential sermon, and for thy grace which thou hast now given us in the consideration of it. Impress it deeply on our hearts by thy Holy Spirit; and grant that when we reflect on thy sufferings, we may say, If this be done in a green tree, what shall be done in a dry? May all sleeping consciences be roused by this consideration, and be filled with the salutary dread of the wrath of God; that they may be awakened to a sincere repentance. Spare, we beseech thee, those barren trees which thou still findest among us, and by thy vital power make them fruitful in good works. As for those whom thou hast already fertilized, give them to abound more and more in the fruits of faith and love, that the name of thy Father may be glorified in them. Amen.

CONSIDERATION III.

THE CRUCIFIXION OF THE LORD JESUS.

'AND they bring him unto a place, called in the Hebrew, Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, the place of a skull. And they gave him to drink vinegar [or sour wine] mingled with myrrh and gall: And when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink; and he received it not. And they crucified him there, and two other malefactors with him; one on the right hand, and the other on the left, and Jesus in the midst. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do,' (Matt. xxvii. 33, 34, 38. Mark xv. 22, 23, 27, 28. Luke xxiii. 33, 34. John xix. 17, 18.)

In these words we have an account of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus; concerning which the following particulars are here mentioned:

First, The place where it was performed.

Secondly, The preparation for it.

Thirdly, The crucifixion itself.

Fourthly, Christ's intercession for his enemies during his crucifixion.

I. First, As to the place where Jesus was crucified, we are told in general, that it was on Mount Golgotha; and we are further particularly informed, that he was crucified in the middle between two malefactors.

Mount Golgotha, or the Place of a Skull, derived that name either from the roundness of its summit, which resembled a human skull, or from the skulls of those who had been beheaded there; for, according to all appearance, Pilate had made this hill the theatre of several executions. Possibly it was the usual place where criminals were beheaded, or put to death some other way. Places appropriated for the

execution of malefactors, among the ancients, were generally on eminences; that the greater number of spectators might be able to see the execution, and be deterred from committing the like crimes. How must the spotless soul of the Son of God been affected, as he ascended this mountain, which was covered with crowds of spectators rejoicing at his ignominious death! What a contrast was there between this ascent to Golgotha, and his former descent on Mount Sinai, when he was attended by hosts of adoring angels, and displayed his glory to the whole people of Israel.

But the place, where our blessed Lord was crucified, is more particularly specified by all the four Evangelists, who observe that two malefactors were crucified with him, one on his right hand, and the other on his left, and Jesus in the midst. Probably, the Jewish rulers had persuaded the Roman soldiers to crucify Jesus in the midst between the two malefactors. By this, their design was to bring the greater contempt on our blessed Saviour, and to make the people imagine, that he was not only guilty of the same crimes with those malefactors, but was their chief, and the ringleader of all those rebels and seditious banditti, with which the whole land of Judea was overrun at that time.

Let us admire the wisdom of God in the choice of this place for the crucifixion of Christ, and observe what doctrines may be deduced from this circumstance of our Saviour's passion.

First, We may observe that the place of Christ's crucifixion was not fortuitously chosen, according to the pleasure of his enemies; but was particularly appointed before by the Divine wisdom.

1. It was a place without the walls of Jerusalem. This happened not only because it was the custom of the Romans and Jews, to execute all capital sentences without the city, and the latter even in the wilderness led blasphemers and sabbath-brakers out of the camp

forth from the Jewish religion, which was at that time extremely corrupt, and all its outward ceremonies, which were superseded by Christ. He exhorts the converted Hebrews, that they would no longer adhere to types and shadows; but, relinquishing the Jewish worship, to acknowledge Christ to be the only High Priest, and his sacrifice the only sacrifice of atonement. He further advises them to appropriate that propitiatory sacrifice to themselves by faith unto salvation, though they might on that account be partakers of the reproach of Christ. By going forth unto Christ without the camp, the Apostle also exhorts us to depart from all the sinful ways of the world, which do not agree with our profession, as followers of a crucified Saviour. Let us therefore refrain from a conformity with the world, which lieth in wickedness. Let us depart from the company of the wicked, where the blood of the Son of God is trampled under foot. Let us go forth from the Sodom of carnal pleasures, wantonness, intemperance, &c. which are by no means consistent with our holy profession. Let us go forth to Christ, that we may bear his reproach, and be partakers of his sufferings. Though the world should ridicule us, and look down on us with contempt; though we should be numbered among transgressors, and condemned to an infamous death; Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, has already sanctified these hardships by his sufferings. To those who believe in him, and suffer for his name, Christ has made reproaches, racks, and tortures, as it were, the steps by which they ascend to the mansion of glory. It must therefore be our fixed resolution, rather to die with him on Golgotha, than deny his truth, and be ashamed of his reproach. For unless we are willing patiently to take upon us his reproach, we shall not be partakers of his everlasting glory. May the Lord Jesus of his infinite grace grant us such a temper.

II. We come now, in the second place, to consider the preparation that was made for the crucifixion of

the Lord Jesus. This was done by giving him a very disagreeable and bitter potion; and here we shall take notice of the behaviour of the soldiers on one hand, and of the Lamb of God on the other.

As for the soldiers, they were full of insolence and cruelty. For, after they had with great difficulty brought the blessed Jesus to Mount Golgotha, who was now wearied and quite spent; they endeavoured, while some of them erected the cross, to force him to drink a bitter potion which they had carried with them for that purpose. It was customary among the Jews to give those who were to suffer a violent death, a rich cordial of wine mixed with all kind of spices, to drink just before they were executed. This custom might be derived from these words of Solomon: 'Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine to those that be of heavy heart; let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more,' (Prov. xxxi. 6, 7.) The Jews used to put a grain or two of frankincense in this liquor, in order to intoxicate the malefactor's senses, that he might be the less terrified at the apprehensions of the cruel death he was going to suffer, and be rendered less sensible of the pains of it. This Jewish custom was here so far observed, that a certain liquor was offered to Jesus to drink before his crucifixion; but even this indulgence was likewise inhumanly abused, for, instead of a cordial, the liquor offered to Christ was extremely bitter, loathsome, and distasteful. According to St. Mark, it was wine mingled with myrrh, and St. Matthew calls it vinegar mingled with gall; for in mixing this liquor they used sour wine, little different from vinegar, and by dissolving myrrh in it, had made it so bitter, that by the taste one would have taken it for a mixture of vinegar and gall. Whether the Jews themselves mixed this liquor, or whether the Roman soldiers did it at the instigation of the Jews, it betrays the most inveterate malice and insatiable cruelty in our blessed Saviour's enemies, who even contrive to

embitter the last moments of his life by giving him this nauseous potion. They treated him on this occasion worse than the most notorious malefactor. For we do not find that any such liquor was offered to the two malefactors, who were crucified with Jesus.

But let us enquire how the Lamb of God behaved on this occasion. The Evangelists inform us, that 'When he had tasted thereof, he would not drink; so that he received it not.' Thus he tasted this bitter nauseous draught, and permitted some drops to moisten his parched mouth; but he refused to drink up the bitter potion which was offered to him. At the same time, the hand of God restrained the brutal enemies of the blessed Jesus, so that they did not compel him to drink the mixture they had prepared for him.

But we are not to suppose that our blessed Saviour refused to take this cup out of mere delicacy, because the taste displeased him: He did it rather from wise and just motives. We have observed above, that such liquors were given to malefactors to drink, just before they were executed, with a double view; which was either to intoxicate the malefactor's senses; or to throw him into such a stupor, as to make him less sensible of the pangs of death; or perhaps to hasten his death, that he might be sooner out of his pain. But neither of the two last could take place in our blessed Saviour; and probably it was the least of his enemies' intentions to alleviate or shorten his pains. At least, he did not desire to lessen his sufferings; but was willing to feel them to the last instant of his life, and, for our good, to taste and swallow death in all its bitterness, (Heb. ii. 9.) He was induced by the most exalted love, to offer up himself to his Father amidst the most painful sensations, and voluntarily to lay down his life in the hour which he had appointed for it. The first motive to drink this potion was likewise incompatible with our blessed Saviour's character: For he was resolved to preserve his soul in so-

berness and serenity, and not to die like an intoxicated slave of satan; especially, as he had still several important things to say on the cross, and many remarkable prophecies of Scripture to fulfil. At the same time, our blessed Saviour defeats the purpose of satan, which he thought to execute by means of these sons of Belial. It was their design to have deprived him of his senses, so that whatever he said might be indecent and foolish; that he might curse his enemies, behave like a frantic person. But this expectation of the devil and our Saviour's enemies, was baffled; for Jesus declined drinking the liquor, which had been prepared in order to make him an object of ridicule. These were probably the wise motives of our blessed Lord's behaviour on this occasion. Hence we may learn these truths,

1. It is the temper of the world to endeavour, that every thing may be embittered and rendered disagreeable to the members of Jesus Christ.

Of this we have a notorious instance in the behaviour of our Saviour's enemies. The men of this world cannot find it in their hearts to shew the smallest, and most usual kind offices, to the godly; and when there is an unavoidable necessity of so doing, they are very industrious so to embitter every indulgence shewn them, that the children of God shall be little the better for it. All their cordials are mingled with gall, and in all their consolations there is a large portion of vinegar; and even under the specious appearance of doing good, they endeavour to molest and afflict them. To this hardship the servants of God must inure themselves; and they may be assured once for all, that, instead of any comfort from the world, all they have to expect is an increase of their reproach and misery. Their glorious chief fared no better; and therefore they are not to expect any other treatment.

2. Jesus Christ, by tasting the bitterness of this nauseous potion, was to expiate the voluptuous deli-

cacy of our taste, and to acquire for us a right to the taste of God's love and sweet consolation.

He did not indeed drink up this liquor; but he tasted it, and consequently experienced its bitterness. This bitterness is not only an emblem of the bitterness of sin, which is frequently compared in Scripture to gall, vinegar, wormwood, and other distasteful things; but of the curse and chastisement due to sin. Hence the Prophet says, 'Ye have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock,' (Amos vi. 12.) Hence the Scripture in another place attributes to God an intoxicating cup, the dregs of which all the wicked shall wring out, and drink them, (Psalm lxxv. 9. Isaiah li. 17.) The Lord also thus threatens sinners, by his Prophet; 'I will feed this people with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink,' (Jer. ix. 15.) The bitterness which would have been our eternal portion, our Mediator has once tasted, in order thereby to expiate all the sins of the penitent, to administer to them the sweets of Divine comfort at the hour of death, and to give them an antepast of eternal felicity.

Therefore, reflect ye, who still drink the intoxicating cup of Satan, what the blessed Jesus suffered to obtain for you a right to the grace of God, and his sweet consolations. Oh forbear thus greedily to drink iniquity like water, (Job xvi. 15.) which will cause woe and bitterness perhaps in this world, and in the next torture without end! be not afraid of the bitter myrrh of godly sorrow, which is far preferable to the false sweetness of sinful pleasures. Is it not better to mourn for a short time, than to grieve forever? Is it not better here to drink a bitter potion in the fellowship of Christ, and afterwards to be eternally exhilirated with the delights of paradise, than to be intoxicated with the cup of sin? as for you, who have tasted of the love of God, and the sweetness of his consolations, know that you owe this to the bit-

terness of suffering, which your mediator has tasted in your stead. Let this consideration move you to a more ardent love of him, who has emptied your cup of sufferings of all its bitterness, and alleviated your afflictions, by mingling with them the sweets of his enlivening comforts.

III. In the next place, we are to consider the crucifixion itself. St. John, who is known to have been present, describes this transaction in a very succinct manner, 'where they crucified him.' It seems as if this Evangelist, when he was going to describe this bloody and barbarous action, was so affected with the melancholy subject, that the tender love he bore to his divine master would not suffer him to dwell upon the particulars. The Roman manner of crucifying malefactors was as follows. The cross being first raised perpendicularly, and firmly fixed in the ground, the criminal who was to be fastened on it was stripped naked, and so exposed to the public view, without the least covering. Then the soldiers lifted him on a piece of timber, which projected from the erect beam of the cross, like a kind of seat, and so placed him on it, that the legs hung down on each side of this seat. Then they proceeded to stretch out the upper part of the body, and to extend both arms; and, having first bound them to the transverse beam of the cross, nailed them to it with large iron nails, driven through the palms of each hand. Lastly, the legs were stretched out; and being placed close to each other, each of them was separately nailed to the perpendicular beam of the cross. In this ignominious and painful manner, according to the most probable conjectures, was the Lord of life crucified.

But the extraordinary pain and ignominy with which this punishment was attended, will appear more evident, if we consider,

I. That the person who was to be crucified was stripped from head to foot, and thus was fastened to the cross quite naked, in the sight of a vast number of

spectators. What an indignity was this, for this divine teacher, and prophet, the supreme messenger of the heavenly father! the Roman laws ordered none to be crucified but the worst of malefactors, who was deemed unworthy to tread on the earth; but the divine law farther annexes a particular execration on this punishment, for he that is hanged is to be accursed of God, (Deut. xxi. 23.) This punishment was likewise extremely painful. For as the criminal was previously scourged, when his garments were taken off they must naturally tear the wounds open again, which must be a very sensible pain. The whole body was so strained on the cross, that the bones were in a manner dislocated, and the ribs appeared so plain that they might be counted, (Psalm xxii. 17.) The hands and feet were not only stretched and bound with cords, but were also pierced with large nails; and as the sensation is exquisite in these parts of the body, by reason of the many ramifications of the nerves with which they are stored, we may naturally think that the nailing of them must occasion the most excruciating pains. After all this, the body, torn by the scourges and pierced by the nails, remained for some hours in the open air, slowly bleeding to death, and languishing under inexpressible torture.

Oh, what an astonishing humiliation is this! that the Lord of Glory should take on him such a painful and infamous death, and be obedient to his Father, even to the death of the cross; that those hands should be pierced, which spread out the heavens, and by their touch had healed so many impotent and sick; that nails should be driven through those feet, to which a promise is given, that all enemies shall lie down before them in the dust; that he, from whom all derive their clothing, should be stripped of his garments; that the King of Israel should be an abomination, and the Deity become a curse.

Upon these circumstances of our Saviour's passion, *let us make* the following observations:

First, as the place where our blessed Lord was crucified, was not chosen without God's direction; so neither was the punishment of crucifixion appointed for the Saviour of the world without the wisest views. For this sort of death was very suitable to the mystery of our redemption, as will appear by the following particulars.

1. It aptly represented Christ's mediatorial office; for as he here hung between heaven and earth, so he was that exalted and adorable person who was to adjust the concerns of mankind with God, and reconcile heaven and earth.

2. By this lingering punishment on the cross, where the crucified person lived several hours, and some times two or three days, our Saviour's patience, resignation, and obedience was most properly tried, and his inconceivable love to the human race displayed to the admiration of angels and men.

3. By reason of the curse annexed to this death, it was the best adapted to him, who was to be a curse, in order to obtain a blessing for us.

4. By this ignominious and painful death, the justice of God, and his extreme hatred of sin, were signally manifested.

5. It was a punishment by which the sacred blood of Christ, which was to be our ransom, and to purify our consciences from dead works, was to be abundantly shed.

6. This exaltation of Christ on the cross was a type of his future exaltation to the right hand of God.

7. Lastly, the wisdom of God had before, by many types and prophecies in the Old Testament, signified that the Messiah was to die by this kind of punishment. The prophecies of David and Zachariah (Psalm xxii. and Zach. xii. 10.) were particularly fulfilled by our Saviour's crucifixion. The offering of Isaac, the erecting of a brazen serpent, the Paschal Lamb, and indeed all sacrifices, which were lifted up, and laid on the altar to be consumed by fire, were types which

prefigured the death of Christ on the cross. Let us therefore humbly adore the infinite wisdom of God, which, from such wise motives, appointed this sort of punishment to be inflicted on our mediator. Let us admire the Father's unspeakable love, in thus giving up his only begotten Son to the most ignominious and painful death. But let us also gratefully revere the transcendent love of the Son, in descending from the throne of God to die on the cross, and humbling himself below the comprehension of man or angel.

Secondly, The crucifixion of Christ is to be accounted the most essential part of his sufferings.

By our Saviour's suffering on the tree, our sin which was committed at the tree of knowledge, and the innumerable transgressions which have been the consequences of our fall, are expiated. Our Mediator, by permitting his hands to be extended, and nailed to the cross, has satisfied for our first parents' sin, in stretching forth their sinful hands to the forbidden fruit. By suffering his sacred feet to be nailed to the cross, he has satisfied for their approach to the forbidden tree, and our voluntary choice of the ways of perdition, if we leave them by repentance. By suffering himself to be raised up as a gazing-stock, while he expired by such an ignominious and painful death, he has atoned for the presumptuous arrogance of our first parents, by which they attempted to lift themselves up to the very throne of God, and impiously wished to have no superior. Oh wonderful love! worthy subject of our continual meditations, and deserving our most grateful acknowledgments! So deep an humiliation, so low an abasement of a person of such transcendent dignity, must necessarily be productive of glorious and wonderful effects. On this cross our reconciliation was atchieved, (Eph. ii. 16.) On this cross peace was concluded betwixt heaven and earth, (Col. i. 20.) On this cross the hand writing, that was against us, was cancelled, blotted out, and taken away, (Col. ii. 14.) On this cross the

curse was repealed, and the blessing obtained, (Gal. iii. 13, 14.) This cross is as it were the ladder by which man ascends to heaven, and the Throne of Grace, where the sinner finds pardon and forgiveness. This is the triumphal car of the commander in chief of God's host. Here he triumphed over sin, which he bore in his own body on the cross. Here he triumphed over the power of satan, whose head was bruised by the heel of him who trod the old serpent under foot. Here he triumphed over the curse of the law, and placed his redeemed in perfect security. Here, at the same time, he hung as it were, in the most endearing attitude, extending his arms in order to gather in and embrace all the truly penitent. Let us learn from our blesssed Saviour's crucifixion, how we are to crucify the old man, and to mortify self-conceit, self-love, and every inordinate desire. Henceforth the world must be crucified unto us; and, the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, must be as loathsome in our eyes as an executed malefactor. Henceforth we must harbour no sinful thoughts, no viscious desires which are displeasing to our crucified Saviour. Henceforth the reproach of Christ must be our glory, and his cross our standard by which we must live and die. We must say to our Redeemer, as faithful Ittai did to David, 'As the Lord liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be,' (2 Sam. xv. 21.) Oh blessed fellowship of the cross, the consequence of which is a fellowship of glory!

IV. We come now, in the last place, to consider our blessed Lord's intercession for his enemies during his crucifixion. St. Luke observes that when they crucified the blessed Jesus, he cried out, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.' In all appearance, these words were uttered by our blessed Saviour while the Roman soldiers were extending his sacred body, and nailing it to the cross. While

their impious hands were employed in treating the Son of God in the most injurious manner, he, as a merciful High Priest, employs his tongue in praying for them, and intercedes with the justice of God to pardon and forgive them. 'Father, forgive them.' How properly does Jesus here use the endearing title of Father, when by the most generous love of his inveterate enemies, he so gloriously resembles his heavenly Father, whose exuberant goodness extends to the unthankful, and to the evil, (Luke vi. 28, 35, 36.) In this address of the Son of God to his Father, we may observe an intercession and an excuse, for his merciless enemies. He intercedes with his heavenly Father, that he would forgive these his blind unthinking creatures the grievous sin, which they were now committing against his beloved Son, and that he would grant them time and grace for repentance. As some alleviation and excuse for their perpetrating this atrocious deed, he alledges their ignorance, and supplicates his Father to look on these wretched men with eyes of mercy and compassion, to pity their want of understanding, and to bring them out of their blindness and ignorance into the light of the gospel. Behold a prophet far surpassing Moses in meekness and gentleness! Behold a gracious monarch, who takes more delight in pardoning and forgiving his subjects, than in rigour and severity! Behold a merciful High Priest, who has compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way, (Heb. v. 2.) and even when he is on the point of offering himself up for a sacrifice, prays that his enemies may have the first fruits of the atonement which he made for sin! But these words of our Lord Jesus have on another occasion been explained at large, and published separately.

However, as these words of our blessed Saviour proceed from the most fervent love and affection, they should leave behind them a salutary impression on our hearts, and serve as a blessed encouragement

to draw sinners into the arms of his mercy; those sinners who are, as it were, within the jaws of death; those sinners who have run such terrible lengths as to seem past hopes of mercy; those sinners who have received mercy but forfeited it again; and those less heinous sinners who, after receiving a due portion of divine grace, are conscious of many sins of infirmity and surprise. Blessed is the man who, by a grateful love of his crucified Saviour, is moved eternally to renounce sin and its accursed service, and is determined to offer himself up to him who 'not only loved his own,' but also his very enemies.

THE PRAYER.

We adore thy perfect love, O merciful Saviour, which humbled thee even to the cross, that thou mightest exalt us to the throne of God. Eternally praised be thy name, O blessed Jesus, that for us rebels and outlaws thou didst vouchsafe to become a curse on the cross, that the great copious stream of divine blessings might flow upon us. Be thou forever praised, who didst condescend to be raised on the cross, as the great antitype of the brazen serpent which was lifted up in the desart, that all who look on thee in faith may be healed, and live. (John iii. 14.) O fulfil in us all that comfortable promise, that after thy exaltation thou wouldest draw all men unto thee! (John xii. 32.) draw to thy cross the carnal, the secure, and the licencious; and convince them, that without crucifying their lusts, they can have no share in the blessings which thou didst procure by thy crucifixion. Draw to thy cross the troubled, anxious, and timerous consciences, and heal them by the salutary sight of thy sufferings. Draw to thy cross thy true disciples, and grant that they may more and more increase in grace and wisdom, and in the knowledge of thee. O gather together all those who are scattered abroad, far from thee and the light of thy gospel, and embrace them with the arms of thy mercy. Amen.

CONSIDERATION IV.

THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC, A TYPE OF THE GREAT SACRIFICE AND CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST.

'AND it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham! And he said, behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains, which I will tell thee of. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up and went unto the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said unto his young men, abide you here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand and a knife: and they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, my father! and he said here am I, my son: And he said, behold the fire and wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, my son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together. And they came to the place which God had told him of, and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order; and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the Angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham! Abraham! and he said here am I. And he said,

lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked; and behold, behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh, as it is called to this day. And the Angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, by myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed my voice. So Abraham returned unto his young men, and they rose up, and went together to Beer-sheba, and dwelt there.' (Genesis xxii. 1—19.)

As I have observed in the last consideration, that the sacrifice of Isaac was one of the types which prefigured the crucifixion of Christ, it will not be improper to insert in this place a particular consideration on this glorious type, and thus to diversify the affecting piece of our blessed Saviour's crucifixion, as it were with light and shade. The spirit of God has been pleased to intimate to us, that several incidents which happened to the Messiah are prefigured and typified in the account of this remarkable transaction. For St. Paul in the epistle to the Hebrews, (chap. xi. 17, 18, 19.) in which he explains several types exhibited in the old Testament, makes this observation: 'By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises, offered up his only begotten son, of whom it

was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting, that God was able to raise him up even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.'

Here we see in what light Isaac is to be considered in this whole transaction, namely, as the type of Jesus Christ; who was the centre to which every part of the preceding divine œconomy tended, and the great antitype or substance of all the shadowy types of the Old Testament. This is the seed which was promised to Abraham, in whom all the nations of the earth was to be blessed; for the Angel sayest not, 'And to seeds, as of many, but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ.' (Gal. iii. 16.) Our blessed Lord represents himself as the Antitype of Isaac, and the rejected Ishmael as a type of the carnal Jews, when he says, 'The servant abideth not in the house forever; but the Son abideth ever.' (John viii. 35.) St. Paul likewise manifestly alludes to the account of the sacrifice of Isaac, when he observes in the Epistle to the Romans, that 'God spared not his own Son,' (Rom. viii. 32.) which words seem to allude to those of God to Abraham, 'Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me, (Gen. xxii. 12.) These intimations of the Holy Spirit are a sufficient warrant for our entering deeper in this remarkable history, and tracing in it the mystery of Christ.

The road here is already beaten for us; since, from the very commencement of the Christian religion, Isaac has been always looked upon as a lively type of the Messiah, and his sacrifice of himself. Even the ancient Jewish church perceived the mystery of this transaction, and believed that the binding of Isaac, in order to be sacrificed, was a type of the Messiah, by the sacrifice of whom God was to be reconciled to the Jews. But the Jewish church afterwards totally apostatized from the faith of their ancestors, and expected the Messiah to appear as a temporal prince.

The later Jews being under this delusion, attributed the reconciliation of Israel to Isaac's being bound. Accordingly the modern Jewish writings are full of the importance of this transaction; and in their devotions on every new-year's-day, they beseech God that he would be pleased to think of Isaac's being bound, and that he will be gracious to them for the sake of his bonds. Thus that obstinate, infatuated people ascribe to the type what they ought to seek for in the great antitype. Blessed be God for that light which is risen on us in the Gospel, by the help of which we see, in all the circumstances of the history of this transaction, a very great resemblance with the circumstances of the crucifixion of Christ.

The two principal persons mentioned in the history of this remarkable transaction are Abraham and Isaac. The former of these was a type of the heavenly Father, and the latter a type of Jesus Christ his only begotten son.

With regard to Abraham, as he was a father who had an uncommon tenderness and affection for his children, so that it was with great difficulty and reluctance he was prevailed on to consent that Ishmael, though rude and petulant, should be turned out of doors; much greater must have been the violence offered to his paternal heart, when he submitted to put to death his beloved and obedient son Isaac. Thus God, the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is love itself. He desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should live; much less would he desire the death of his innocent son, had not his justice required such a satisfaction.

However, as Abraham, at the divine command, spared not his beloved son, but willingly prepared to put him to death; so likewise the father of our Lord Jesus Christ determined at the demand of his justice, to give his only son up to death for us, that in him should be accomplished (Acts iv. 28.) what his wise counsel had before determined to be done.

As Abraham, in his ready willingness to offer up his son at the divine command, gave the highest proof of his love to God; so the heavenly Father has given the highest proof of his tender love to man, since he did not spare his own son, but gave him up a sacrifice for us all. 'In this, saith St. John, was manifested the love of God towards us, because God sent his only begotten son into the world, that we might live through him.' (1 John iv. 9.)

Abraham himself carried the knife in his hand, in order to sacrifice his son, together with the fire to kindle the pile of wood under the burnt offering. In like manner, the heavenly Father has shewn the rigour of his justice in his son's sufferings, and drawn it against our surety as a sharp sword, which he thus addresses: 'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow; smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.' (Zach. xiii. 7.)

As to the other principal person concerned in this mysterious transaction, namely Isaac; he represents our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who was the great antitype prefigured by all the types of the Old Testament.

Isaac was the only son of his father, being his only child by Sarah, and consequently he was heir to all his possessions; (Gen. xxv. 5.) a child whose birth had been promised long before, and whose coming into the world had been expected for several years. Christ likewise is the only begotten son of the father (John i. 18.) whom God hath appointed heir of all things (Heb. i. 3.) a son whose coming into the world was expected by all holy men for four thousand years, and who was preceded by many gracious promises; a son who, like Isaac, was named before his birth, and, contrary to the usual course of nature, was produced, by the divine power, from the barren womb of a virgin, as Isaac was conceived in the dead womb of Sarah (Gen. xviii. 14. Luke i. 35, 37.) Isaac was a son for whom

his father had the tenderest affection; for the omniscient God says to him, 'take thou thy son, thine only son Isaac whom thou LOVEST.' The like circumstance the Scripture relates also concerning Jesus Christ. He is called God's dear son. (Col. i. 13.) He was begotten of the eternal love of the father, who himself sent a voice from heaven, saying, 'this is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased,' (Matt. iii. 17.) John the Baptist beareth witness that 'the father loveth the son, and hath given all things into his hand,' (John iii. 35.) as Abraham gave all his possessions to his beloved son Isaac.

Isaac was a very obedient son, who, instead of making an ill use of his father's affectionate tenderness, always honoured him with the most unreserved obedience and submission; and in this transaction more particularly, he gave an astonishing proof of it in a very extraordinary case, at the very thought of which nature itself shudders. He patiently submitted, without making any remonstrance against the will of God, and of his father. And though he was grown to years of maturity (being supposed to be four and thirty years of age when this happened,) and therefore might easily have made his escape from his aged father; yet he suffers Abraham to bind him, to lay him on the wood, and proceed as he pleased. In the same manner also our blessed Saviour might easily have escaped from the hands of his enemies. He had not only sufficient strength in himself to procure his liberty; but also twelve legions of Angels were ready at his command, if he had been inclined to make use of them. But the blessed Jesus was obedient to his father, even unto death, the painful and ignominious death of the cross, (Philip. ii. 8.)

Isaac was an innocent son, and, though he was to be put to death by the divine command, had committed nothing worthy of death. But who was ever more undeservedly led to death than the only, the beloved son of God, who had always done what was acceptable to his father? who was holy, inno-

cent, undefiled, and separate from sinners; who knew no sin, and in whose mouth was no guile.—Thus Isaac exhibits a lively type of Jesus Christ, the only, the beloved, the obedient, the innocent son of God.

As to the rest of the circumstances of this transaction between Abraham and Isaac, they bear a striking resemblance to those of our Saviour's passion,

First, In the circumstances preceding the transaction.

Secondly, In the circumstances connected with it.

Thirdly, In the circumstances subsequent to this remarkable transaction.

First, Among the circumstances preceding the transaction, the following deserve particular notice.

1. The land of Moriah was the place appointed, on which Abraham was to sacrifice his son Isaac; so that he was not to be offered up in his father's house, but at a considerable distance from it. A similar circumstance appears in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He was the person typified by all the offerings mentioned in the Old Testament: hence it might be expected that Christ would have been offered up in the temple, as it was a place dedicated to his father, and emphatically called the house of God. But as Isaac, the type of Christ, was to have been sacrificed at a distance from his father's house; so was Jesus likewise to be sacrificed without the temple, his heavenly Father's house, and in the very place appointed for the sacrificing of Isaac. For as the land of Moriah included a considerable mountainous tract in those parts, it comprehended not only the mountain of that name, on which the temple was built (2 Chron. iii. 1.) but likewise Mount Sion, Mount Akra, the Mount of Olives, and Mount Golgotha. Now as God was pleased to choose one of these eminencies in the land of Moriah for this typical offering, it is very probable that he chose that on which our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Isaac's great antitype, was afterwards to be offered up.

2. Isaac, by the way to the land of Moriah conversed very affectionately with his father. 'And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said My father!' [where the Chaldee parapharase uses the word Abba.] And Abraham answered, 'Here am I, my son.' The same filial affection shines forth in the Lord Jesus; and his first and last sayings on Mount Golgotha, begun with the endearing title of Father. And his heavenly Father, though not in words, answered him in effect, by powerfully strengthening him to undergo his sufferings, as if he had said, Here am I, my Son; and at length receieves his soul into his hands.

3. Isaac carried the wood on which he was to be laid, and offered for a burnt-offering. 'And Abraham rose up early in the morning, &c. and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up and went to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son.' Thus it is said of our Saviour, that 'he went forth bearing his cross,' and thus he dragged to the place of execution that heavy piece of timber on which he was afterwards to be sacrificed.

4. Isaac was alone with his father the day on which he was to be sacrificed; the two servants which followed them being left at a distance. Christ was likewise on the day of his crucifixion left by his disciples, who had fled from him the night before, and were dispersed. Yet he was not alone, but conversed with his father, as he had foretold in these words: 'Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that every man shall be scattered to his own, and shall leave me alone: And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me,' (John xvi. 32.)

Secondly, Let us consider the circumstances which attended the transaction itself, and we shall find that several circumstances of Christ's crucifixion were exactly prefigured by them.

1. Isaac probably was stripped of his clothes when he was to be sacrificed, according to the usual cere-

mony on such occasions. For before the victims were placed on the altar to be sacrificed, their skin, which is their apparel, was taken off. Hence it may reasonably be concluded, that in this sacrifice also, the apparel of the intended victim was taken off. It is said of Christ, by St. John, (John xix. 23.) 'Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments;' so that the Messiah, like his type, was sacrificed naked.

2. Isaac was bound hand and foot; for it is said in the text, 'And Abraham bound Isaac his son.' Our blessed Saviour's arms were not only bound to the cross, according to the Roman custom, when he was to drag it up to Mount Golgotha; but when he was lifted up on the cross, after it was erected, his hands were first stretched out and fastened to it with cords, before they were nailed, as we have already observed in the last Consideration.

3. Isaac was lifted from the earth on the altar, and then laid upon the wood. In like manner Christ was lifted up on the wood of the cross as a public example, and a victim to the divine justice, as he had foretold to Nicodemus in these words, 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness; even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,' (John iii. 14.)

4. Isaac was laid on the wood entire and alive; a circumstance which deserves particular attention.—Those beasts which were appointed for sacrifices were first killed by the side of the altar, and dismembered or severed into several pieces, before they were laid upon it. But Isaac was laid upon the altar entire and alive; being appointed as a type or figure of that sacrifice which was to be lifted up on the wood alive, and of which not a bone was to be broken. Could there well be a greater resemblance of concurring circumstances, to adumbrate the crucifixion of Christ, than we behold in the instance before us? If we farther consider the astonishing patience of Isaac, in bearing all this patiently and silently, without any

contradiction or repugnance, it exhibits the very image of Jesus Christ, who, amidst all the tortures he endured, did not open his mouth. These are the circumstances which attended the transaction itself; namely, that Isaac was lifted up on the wood, naked, bound, entire, and alive, as a type of the crucifixion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, Among the circumstances subsequent to this transaction, the following are particularly remarkable:

1. After Isaac had been for three days, as it were, dead in his father's heart, [for Abraham consigned him, as he thought, to certain death] he was restored to him alive on the third day. Thus on the third day, Christ was also raised from the dead. What happened to Isaac in a figure (Heb. xi. 19.) was fulfilled in our blessed Saviour, the great antitype, in truth and reality. Here indeed we may observe a deficiency in the type. For Isaac did not actually die; nor was he actually sacrificed, though Abraham had already put the knife to his throat. However, God was pleased to accept of this obedience of Abraham and Isaac, and presented to the father of the faithful a ram entangled in a thicket, which the good patriarch killed, and sacrificed instead of Isaac his son. But Christ was really sacrificed personally. Here the divine justice would not accept the will for the deed. For as there is no remission of sins without shedding of blood, it was necessary that the blood of Christ should be shed in reality. Thus did Jesus really and truly die, and is in reality risen again from the dead. There was none to release the blessed Jesus, no vacarious victim that could supply his place in this great propitiatory sacrifice; there was no creature in heaven or on earth qualified to finish this sacrifice, which was to appease and satisfy the divine justice for the sins of mankind.

2. Isaac, who had been bound, was likewise released from his bonds on the third day by his father.

In the like manner, it is said of the heavenly Father in scripture, (Acts ii. 24.) that he 'hath raised his son by loosing the pains of death,' or as they are called in the Psalms, (Psalm. xviii. 5.) 'the snares of death;' and thus set our surety at liberty, 'it being impossible that he should be holden of death.'

3. Isaac, after this, returned alive to the servants in Abraham's house, and lived with his father; for we find that 'Abraham returned unto his young men and they rose up and went together to Beer-sheba, and dwelt there.' Thus Christ, after appearing alive to his disciples, returned to his Father, by whom he was sent into the world, and in whose house he now eternally dwells, being ministered unto and adored by all the angelic host.

4. After Isaac was, as it were, risen from the dead, he became the father of an innumerable multitude. For he begat Jacob, the father of the twelve Patriarchs; and the latter propagated the race of Abraham, until at length it became as the stars of heaven, and the sand on the sea shore for number, according to the divine promise which, after this transaction, was confirmed by an oath in the following words: 'By myself have I sworn that in blessing I will bless thee, and multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.' In like manner, the prophet says of the Messiah, who died, and rose again, 'When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great; and he shall divide the spoil with the strong' (Isa. liii. 10—12.) Thus Christ is become the father of an innumerable multitude of children, many of whom he has already translated to glory: and all the promises

of God are, as it were, sealed anew and ratified by his resurrection (Heb. vi. 13—20.)

No rational man will imagine, that all these remarkable circumstances should thus concur fortuitously in these two remarkable events. Certainly, the hand of infinite wisdom must have interfered in the affair, and so directed the several incidents, as collectively to form a complete type or representation of the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ.

Let us therefore, first, admire the veracity and faithfulness of God in fulfilling his promises. By the crucifixion of Jesus Christ he has actually accomplished what he had prefigured by this type several centuries before, and, at the same time, verified the saying of faithful Abraham, 'God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering.'

Secondly, Let us acknowledge the justice of God; since he would not spare his only, his beloved, his innocent, and obedient son. For after he had taken our sins on himself, and appeared in our stead before the Divine tribunal, as that lamb which was to be sacrificed for the sins of the world; he was stripped of all his apparel, bound, and lifted up alive on the cross; where his blood was shed in order to appease the justice of God, and to blot out our sins. Who does not in this proceeding see the great hatred and abhorrence which God bears to sin, and his severity in punishing it? It should there impress a holy fear on our hearts, and remind us of the words of our blessed Lord, viz, 'If these things be done in a green tree,' if the obedient and innocent Son of God be thus punished, 'what will be done to the dry?'

Thirdly, But let us also here adore the inconceivable love of the heavenly Father to the human race, who, as it were, did violence to his own paternal heart; sent his only beloved Son from his bosom; and for us, who had offended him by all manner of wickedness, delivered him up to a painful and ignominious death.

Let us, in the last place, consider the inference which St. Paul makes on this occasion: 'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him for us all: How shall he not with him also freely give us all things?' Nothing is so great, but we may now confidently hope for it from so affectionate a father. Now we may approach him with faith and confidence, since he is reconciled to us by the death of his Son. If God has raised Isaac from the dead in a figure, and restored again to life his beloved Son as the antitype, and loosened the bands of death with which he was bound; we may rest assured that his love will not rest here, but will accomplish in us the whole scheme which his goodness planned. He will collect our scattered ashes; he will raise our bodies from dissolution, invest them with splendor and glory, and translate the whole man, soul and body, into the blissful mansions of his house; into which Christ, the great antitype of Isaac, is long since entered, in order to prepare a place for us.

THE PRAYER.

O HEAVENLY Father! we adore thy veracity and justice, and likewise thine infinite love, which moved thee to deliver up to death thine only beloved Son; that we might not be preyed upon by eternal death, as sheep appointed for the slaughter. May this amazing instance of thy love be always fresh in our minds, and there flourish and grow; so that our cold hearts may be inflamed with returns of reciprocal love to thee, and remain eternally thine. Grant this for the sake of thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

CONSIDERATION V.

TWO REMARKABLE OCCURRENCES WHICH FOLLOWED THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST.

'AND Pilate wrote a superscription of his accusation, and put it on the cross. And the writing was,

JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews; for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief Priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not the King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written, I have written. Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts (to every soldier a part) and also his coat: Now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said, therefore, among themselves, Let us not rent it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be. And they cast lots upon it what every man should take; that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did. And sitting down, they watched him there; and it was about the third hour when they crucified him.' (Matt. xxvii. 36, 37. Mark xv. 24, 25, 26. Luke xxiii. 34—38. John xix. 19—24.)

In these words we have an account of two remarkable occurrences, which happened at our blessed Saviour's crucifixion; and these are,

First, The putting up a title or superscription on the cross.

Secondly, The dividing our Saviour's garments.

I. Concerning the title of our crucified Saviour, the following circumstances are mentioned by the Evangelists:

1. The author of it; and this was Pilate. 'Pilate wrote a superscription,' *i. e.* he gave orders that it should be written and affixed to the cross. Thus it is said above, 'Pilate took Jesus and scourged him,' (John xix. 1.) *i. e.* he gave orders to the soldiers to scourge him; and the same evangelist afterwards says, (verse 19.) that Pilate put the title on the cross; but this St. Matthew expresly imputes to the soldiers,

(Matt. xxvii. 27—37.) Thus Pilate is made the author of this superscription, as it was done by his order, and dictated by him. Pilate in this particular acted according to the Roman custom. Among the the Jews, it was usual for a crier to go before persons who were led to execution, and at certain intervals to proclaim publicly to the people the cause of their condemnation. This was sometimes also done among the Romans. But, for the most part, the cause of the malefactor's punishment was written in black-letters on a piece of whitish wood; as the soldiers did on this occasion by Pilate's order.

2. The place where this superscription was put is specified; for it was set up over his head on the cross. This is likewise agreeable to the Roman custom.—For the tablet, containing the cause of the criminal's death, was usually carried before him when he was led to his execution; and after the malefactor was fastened on the cross, the superscription was set up just above the transverse beam, directly over the head of the criminal.

3. The words of the superscription are mentioned; and these specified the pretended crime for which Christ suffered death. Our blessed Saviour had, indeed, been charged with many crimes, not one of which could be proved, both before the spiritual court and the civil judge; but Pilate, in the superscription, confined himself to that article of accusation, which the Jews had mostly insisted on before his judgment-seat. Now the capital crime alledged against the Lord Jesus before Pilate was, that he said he was Christ, a king, (Luke xxiii. 2.) and when Pilate afterwards went about to release him, being sufficiently convinced of his innocence, the Jews upbraided him with these words: 'If thou let this man go, thou art not Cesar's friend; whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Cesar.' When Pilate afterwards brought Jesus out, and exhibited him to the public view of the people, saying unto them,

Behold your king; the Jews publicly declared that they had no king but Cesar, and insisted with loud voices, that he should be crucified, as a mere pretender to the sovereign power. Pilate at last delivered Jesus to be crucified; and at the same time, gave orders for writing on a tablet the cause of his crucifixion, which afterwards was placed over his head on the cross. The superscription, according to St. John who stood by the cross, and may be supposed to have seen and read it, was this: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS, which in substance agrees with St. Matthew's account, namely, THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Pilate's design by this title was only to expose the Jews, and ridicule their folly; since they were always in expectation of a king, and when he appeared, they would not rest till they caused him to be crucified. But, that God had other views in permitting this superscription to be set up, I shall endeavour to shew in the sequel.

4. The languages are specified in which the superscription was written. For, according to St. Luke and St. John, it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. It was written in Hebrew, because it was the vernacular tongue of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, where our Saviour was crucified; though the dialect then used by the Jews, was something different from the pure, ancient Hebrew. It was written in Greek, because that language was become very common all over the East since the time of Alexander, and was particularly spoken by those Jews, who were dispersed among the Gentiles, and of whom great numbers were now at Jerusalem, on account of the feast. Lastly, it was also written in Latin, because Judea was then a Roman province, and consequently under the dominion of the Roman emperors, who in their laws and edicts made use of that language. Hence it is very probable, that there was no person then at Jerusalem who could not read this superscription in one of these three languages. And this was Pilate's

chief design in causing the title to be written in these different languages, that those who did not understand one language, might by means of another see on what account this celebrated prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, had been put to death, at the urgent solicitations of the Jews, his own people.

5. Lastly, A dispute is mentioned, which arose between Pilate and the Jews concerning this title. This was occasioned by the following accident. As the place where Jesus was crucified was near Jerusalem, a great number of Jews resorted thither, and read the superscription of our Saviour's accusation, which was fixed over his head. It may be supposed that when so famous a prophet, the fame of whose doctrines and miracles was spread all over the country, was hanging on the cross as a criminal betwixt two malefactors; it must have occasioned a great many surmises, and awakened in the minds, both of foreigners and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, a curiosity to know the cause of so strange a catastrophe. The chief Priests, observing that various remarks were made on the title by the spectators, immediately dispatched a person of note into the city to Pilate, in order to protest against the superscription, and to desire the governor would be pleased to order it to be taken down, and another to be set up in its room. They could not digest the form of the title, *viz.* 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews;' for they were ashamed of such a king, and concluded, that to stile a crucified malefactor their king was an affront to the whole Jewish nation. Therefore, they requested that the superscription might be altered, and instead of 'the king of the Jews,' it should be written, 'He said, I am king of the Jews,' *i. e.* Jesus did indeed pretend to be the king of the Jews; but we are so far from acknowledging him as such, that, as loyal subjects to the Roman emperor, we have caused him to be crucified.

However, the chief Priests met with a repulse on this occasion. Pilate, who was not only by nature a churlish and implacable man, but was also chagrined and disgusted at the tumult raised by the Jews, refused to comply with their demands, and made this abrupt answer: 'What I have written, I have written.' As if he had said, What has been written by my command, I will abide by; I shall not alter a single tittle of it to humour you; who ought to be very well satisfied with having obtained your principal design. The rulers of the Jews thought that they had now got the power into their own hands, and as they had teased and awed Pilate into a compliance with their former demand, he would always be their submissive servant. But on this occasion, Pilate once more puts on the imperious air of a governor, and would no longer be dictated to by the Jews. This resolution, he ought to have shewn before. This is the way of the great ones of this world. When Christ, in his members, has been just fastened to the cross, and the sentence of death has been executed on them, at the instigation of Antichrist; then wicked statesmen, who were the persecutor's tools before, reassume all their superciliousness and scorn to be the dupes of envious ecclesiastics any longer. But the hand of God was in this transaction; who already began to reduce the enemies of Christ to order, and to embitter their carnal exultations at his death by this disappointment. Here these words of the Psalmist were fulfilled: 'The wicked shall see it, and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away: the desire of the wicked shall perish,' (Psalm cxii. 10.)

Hitherto we have considered this superscription only in an historical light. Let us now look something deeper into the counsel of God, which overruled this circumstance; and even from the title which was placed over the head of our crucified Saviour, we may learn the following wholesome doctrines:

1. All the circumstances of the superscription on the cross of Christ were directed by the predetermined counsel and will of God.

We are not to imagine that, because it was agreeable to the Roman customs, God looked on the whole transaction as an unconcerned spectator. If Pilate had his political views in this affair, God had much more exalted motives, agreeable to his infinite wisdom, to permit it. For it is said concerning the passion of Christ in the Acts of the Apostles, (chap. iv. 27, 28.) that Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, did against Jesus what the hand and counsel of God had before determined to be done. We may therefore be well assured that the hand of God was also concerned in this title or superscription. God directed Pilate in drawing up the form of it; but at the same time restrained him from making any alteration in the title.

First, The hand of God directed Pilate in drawing up the title agreeably to the secret views of the Divine wisdom. This superscription was designed partly to be a remarkable testimony of our Saviour's innocence; hence Pilate could not charge him with any crime in this superscription, as no guilt appeared in this most holy and innocent High Priest, who hung on the cross between two murderers. It was likewise designed to be a testimony of the dignity and glory of the person who was here crucified. Here JESUS hung on the cross; that Jesus who was to save his people from their sins; the Saviour of whom all the prophets testified, that they who believed in him should by his name obtain remission of their sins, and of whom, they, among other things, predicted that he should be called a Nazarene, (Matt. ii. 23.) He was therefore to bear this title on the cross, JESUS OF NAZARETH.—He was thus stiled not only because he was brought up in Nazareth, but as he was the antitype of all the Nazarites of the Old Testament; and sacrificed himself for us, and by the strictest vow had bound him-

self to the Father as our surety. JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. This last title was given to the blessed Jesus in allusion to the writings of the prophets, where the promised Messiah is described as the King of the Jews: 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a KING shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is the name whereby he shall be called, The LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, (Jer. xxiii. 5, 6.) Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion! shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, thy KING cometh unto thee: He is just and having salvation, &c.' (Zach. ix. 9.) Therefore, according to the stile of the prophets, this title was the same as if it had been thus expressed: This is Jesus the Messiah. Moreover, as this royal title of the blessed Jesus was set upon the cross, it also denotes that his kingdom is not a worldly kingdom, but the kingdom of the cross; and that the preaching of the cross should be the means, by which the kingdom of Jesus Christ was to be established among the Jews and Gentiles. Other sovereigns, at their demise, are deprived of their dignity, and leave their power to others; but this king obtained even in death a most glorious triumph over his enemies; and of him it may be said, that he did not take full possession of his kingdom till after his decease. Lastly, as this title was written in the three languages which were then most known in the world, we are to understand that this Jesus of Nazareth was not only the king of the Jews, who were the descendants of Abraham; but was to be a king over the whole Israel of God, which was to be gathered together from all people, nations, and languages. To all these particulars which the wisdom of God had in view, Pilate was an utter stranger; but he was made the instrument, who unknowingly acted in subservience to the Divine decrees. But

Secondly, That same omnipotent hand which directed Pilate in drawing up the superscription to be fixed on the cross, also restrained him from giving way to the Jews, who were for making a great alteration in the title. For, since it was to serve as a testimony of our Saviour's innocence, the Jews were by no means to be gratified; who were for charging him with a crime by requesting Pilate to write, 'That he said, I am the King of the Jews.' For, though this was, in some measure, true; Christ having openly declared that he was king of Israel; yet most readers would have annexed quite another meaning to these words, and concluded that Jesus had falsely pretended to be king of the Jews, in opposition to the Roman emperor; and by this means a cloud would have been cast over his innocence. Besides, as this superscription was to be a testimony of the transcendent dignity and glory of Jesus Christ, the title could not undergo any alteration; the kingly dignity of Christ being not subject to any change or diminution no more than his kingdom, which is everlasting and unchangeable. Though the world exert itself in noise and tumult, and though the Jews and Gentiles join together in council, and use their united efforts to shake off the yoke of this almighty king; yet, as the Psalmist prophesies, their combined endeavours to dethrone the king, which God has anointed, will at last turn to their own confusion.

Moreover, the circumstances attending this superscription, or title of Christ, comprehended several mysterious traces of future transactions in the kingdom of Christ, which the hand of Divine Providence, has, as it were, delineated therein.

That Pilate, a person of distinction, and the Roman governor of the province, should himself cause the superscription to be thus written, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews,' and then to be set on the cross, was a prophetic intimation that Pagan sovereigns, rulers, and governors, would acknowledge Christ to be the Lord.

This title was not put at the feet of Jesus, but over his head, to signify, that he was a king who was to be looked on as the head of his church, and whose power was not from below but from above; and that a name should be given him, which was above every name.

This superscription was written in three different languages as a presage of the gift of tongues, imparted at the feast of Pentecost to the Apostles, the heralds of those days; and shews that all languages would soon acknowledge Jesus to be the Lord, to the glory of God the Father; that his dominion would be extended more particularly among the Jews, Greeks, and Romans.

The objection, which the Jewish rulers made against this title, was a sign of the opposition, which the doctrine of Jesus being the Messiah and King of Israel, should afterwards meet with from the unbelieving Jews.

Lastly, no alteration was made in the title out of complaisance to the Jews; this serves to shew that God's decree of exalting Christ to be head and king of the Church would ever remain unchangeable. Thus the wisdom of God may be traced in all the circumstances attending this superscription.

2. The title which was placed on the cross of Jesus Christ is a table from which we may learn several useful lessons.

1. We may learn from it, that the vain fondness for empty titles must be renounced in following the crucified Jesus.

As glorious as this title appears according to God's secret decrees, it was no less scandalous, at the same time, in the eyes of carnal reason. There was not at that time so despicable a nation under the sun as the Jews were; so that to be stiled the king of the Jews, was looked upon by the haughty Romans as far from being any honour. Besides, it must appear very strange for a person who was a king to hang on the

cross stripped naked like a slave. Now as the Lord of Glory did not disdain a title, which seemed so reproachful in the eye of the world, should not this dispose us willingly to renounce our fondness for titles, which is grounded on vanity and pride?

Secondly, whoever will acknowledge Jesus to be his Saviour, and expects to be saved by him, must resolve to take up his cross.

It was certainly for a wise end, that the name of Jesus was set on his cross. For by this circumstance the secret counsel of God designed to intimate, that they who would look on the blessed Jesus as their Saviour and Redeemer, must take on them the cross. Christ and the cross are, as it were, inseparably connected; and what God has joined together let no man put asunder. But alas! how many are unhappily industrious in finding means to separate Christ and the cross. A Saviour they readily embrace; but few choose a Saviour who will lay the cross on them. How few assume the same motto with St. Paul, 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,' (Gal. vi. 14.) The cross is now sweetened, and rendered honourable; since Christ our Saviour hung on it, with his glorious title fastened to it over his sacred head.

Thirdly, whoever owns the blessed Jesus for his king must also be willing to enter into the fellowship of his reproach.

Jesus is, in the title, termed a king; yet behold him in the most disgraceful reproach hanging betwixt heaven and earth. Thus believers likewise are kings and priests to God; and yet how despicable does their kingly dignity appear to the eyes of the world, as it is now hidden under the cross? during the Pagan persecutions it was usual, when they led a martyr to execution, to carry before him a table on which was written the cause of his death, in these words: "This is a Christian." If we lived in those times should we, when asked about our profession, have readily

answered, I am a Christian? It is to be feared, that if the consequence of such a declaration were death, many of us would hesitate, and be at a stand. However, we must be ready to undergo something for the sake of our king when called upon to suffer. Did our blessed Saviour for our sake undergo such a series of sufferings? and shall we not for his sake and for the confession of his kingdom, suffer ourselves to be mocked and despised?

Fourthly, as God can so incline the hearts of his enemies as to make them subservient to his decrees, we, who are under the protection of Jesus Christ, ought to lay aside all fear of men.

What a remarkable proof was it of God's power in turning the human heart, that Pilate, almost like Caiaphas, (John xi. 51.) should write the truth unknowingly and against his will; and that he should be, as it were, the first Apostle, in proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom of Jesus Christ in three different languages! This instance should be an assurance to believers, that all things shall work together for their good; and that even the devices and schemes of their enemies shall terminate in promoting the decrees of God. Who then will be terrified at the enterprizes of their enemies? who will be afraid of them, so as to be deterred from following Christ? They have no power of themselves to hurt us; they cannot do what they will; but, even against their will must execute what God has appointed concerning his servants.

Fifthly, when the cause of Christ seems to be in the greatest danger, then God more eminently displays his glory.

The enemies of Christ little expected, when he was once fastened on the cross, that they should ever hear of him again. But behold! while Jesus was yet hanging on the cross, God begins to glorify his name, by directing Pilate to say, 'What I have written, I have written.' Thus for the consolation of his oppressed

people, God stiles himself 'I am that I am,' (Exodus iii. 14.) The case is still the same; when, to men, things seem irretrievable, God shews himself in his incontroulable power, and draws a line and sets bounds to the desire of the wicked, saying, 'Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; here shall thy proud waves be staid,' (Job xxxviii. 11.)

II. We come, in the next place, briefly to consider the second remarkable circumstance which happened at the crucifixion; namely, the dividing of our blessed Saviour's garments. The account of this circumstance presupposes, that Jesus was stripped of his garments before he was lifted up on the cross; and as his body was lacerated with scourging, it must have occasioned a sensible pain. But neither the pain, nor the ignominy with which this indignity was attended, caused the Lamb of God to make any resistance. He quietly suffered his garments to be taken from him, that he might be a complete burnt offering to the Divine justice. As he came naked and helpless into the world, it pleased him also to go naked out of it. Thus our blessed Lord patiently submitted to this last reproach of being exposed naked before so many thousands; and likewise descended to the lowest step of poverty, being stripped of every thing that belonged to him. It may therefore well be said, 'that he became poor for our sake, that we through his poverty might be rich,' (2 Cor. viii. 9.)

The Lord Jesus having been thus fastened naked to the cross: his clothes, according to the usage of the Romans, fell to the lot of the soldiers who had performed the execution. And as there were four of them concerned in crucifying our blessed Saviour, they now set about dividing his garments. These were of two kinds, namely, a large upper garment which came down to the feet, according to the custom of the Orientals; and under this, a close vest. Hence the Evangelists, particularly St. John, who was present on Mount Golgotha, informs us how the soldiers proceeded in dividing each of these robes.

Of the upper garment they made four parts, to every soldier a part; so that this loose robe was cut into four pieces. Some commentators have observed, that such garments were made of four pieces sewed together, and therefore might be very conveniently divided into four parts. As for the close vest or coat, as it did not consist of several pieces sewed together, but was woven without any seam; they thought it best, instead of cutting it, to cast lots whose it should be. The Evangelists take notice of three particulars relating to this circumstance.

1. They observe, that by this division of our Saviour's garments that scripture was fulfilled, in which David introduces the Messiah, making this complaint: 'They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots.' This prophecy, which even the ancient Jewish Church understood of the Messiah, was now fulfilled; and this accomplishment of it is here mentioned by St. John, in order to guard the faithful against the offence of the cross. If our Saviour's garments had been only divided, it might be said, that this was no more than David might very easily have conjectured; it being customary almost in every country, for the clothes of executed criminals to fall to the executioner's share. Therefore, as David probably knew by the spirit, that the Messiah was to be crucified, he might naturally conclude that he must give up his garment to the executioners. And as the punishment of crucifixion was inflicted by more than one executioner, it might be supposed that his garments would be divided among them. But how could David, from mere conjecture, foretel that lots would be cast for the Messiah's vesture? This circumstance entirely depended on the free will of the Roman soldiers; and yet the Holy Spirit caused it to be predicted many hundred years before; that, by the accomplishment of it, we might be assured that these things had not fallen out fortuitously, and without any design. No one that lived in the time, when this pro-

phecy was delivered in the Old Testament, could have thought that it would be fulfilled literally, and in the very order of the words as delivered by the Psalmist, (Psalm xxii. 18.) But who could have less intention of fulfilling the Scripture than these soldiers, who did not so much as know that any such occurrence had been foretold by the Prophet? This is a miracle of Divine wisdom, in directing these circumstances in such a manner, that men unknowingly fulfil what he has determined; and yet not by compulsion, but still retaining their full freedom. Therefore St. John, who was an eye witness of the whole transaction, breaks out into an exclamation of wonder, 'These things therefore the soldiers did!' The pious Luther has a very remarkable passage on this procedure of the soldiers: "It is my opinion, says that learned divine, that the soldiers did not divide our Saviour's garments for the sake of any profit or advantage, but merely by way of ridicule and jest; as a token that all was over with Jesus, and that he was lost, destroyed, extinct, and utterly forgotten, as the basest and most contemptible of men. Therefore they not only deprived him of life, but would not let his friends or relations have even his clothes for a memorial of him: These miscreants neither expected that he would rise again, nor were afraid that his death would be avenged by his heavenly Father."

2. St. Matthew observes, that the soldiers, after they had divided his garments, sat by the cross, and watched the Lord Jesus. This was done likewise according to the Roman custom: for it was usual to set a soldier or two, and sometimes more, to watch such as were crucified, lest their relations should carry them off either living or dead, and decently inter them. This, in some measure, was also designed as a reflection on the followers of Christ, who were looked upon as a set of people that were for opposing the public execution of justice; and upon this unjust supposition, the disciples were afterwards charged

with having stolen away their master's body out of the sepulchre. Now, whether they had any thoughts that Jesus, by magical arts, would escape from the cross; or whether they apprehended that he would be rescued by the populace; both these suspicions were extremely injurious to our blessed Saviour. Some are likewise of opinion, that a stronger guard than usual was appointed to watch our Saviour on the cross, at the solicitation of the chief priests; yet, by the Divine superintendency, this precaution served only to confirm, before all the people, first the reality of his death, and afterwards of his resurrection.

3. St. Mark observes, that this division of Christ's garments, was made about the third hour, *i. e.* in the third temple hour or great division of the day, which begun at noon, and ended at three in the afternoon: For the Jews divided both night as well as day into four quarters, each of which contained three common hours. If in this circumstance of our Saviour's passion, namely, the dividing of his garments, we consider the behaviour of the Roman soldiers, it must be owned, that they may put many Christians to the blush, who, in the division of inheritances, often break out into violent quarrels, and irreconcilable enmities, and engage in chargeable law-suits. This division, on the contrary, was carried on without the least dispute or wrangling; and such was the prudence and moderation of the parties, that they consented the whole coat should fall by lot to one of them, rather than be spoiled by cutting it asunder. Will not those Pagan soldiers rise in judgment at the last day, to the condemnation of those malignant Christians, who, rather than gratify their neighbour, will suffer a thing to be destroyed, or consume it among lawyers, rather than come to an amicable agreement with their relations. These soldiers are likewise an emblem of those who are satisfied, if they can only get food and raiment by their external profession of religion. Had these wretched men humbled themselves before

Christ, acknowledged their sins, and desired to have been partakers of the forgiveness which he supplicated for them: they might have obtained from him a place in Paradise, as one of the malefactors on the cross did, to his unspeakable happiness. But they, when they had got our Saviour's raiments, cared for nothing further. They leave the blessed Jesus to bleed and die on the cross, while they are busied about dividing his garments. Herein they represent those earthly minded nominal Christians, who, if they can but draw a good income from the world, little concern themselves about knowing Christ, and the power of his resurrection.

But let us now direct our eyes to the Lord Jesus, under these sufferings; for he has both atoned for several sins, and acquired grace for us by his behaviour on this occasion: He has both sanctified such sufferings of his faithful servants, and left them a pattern for their imitation.

He has first expiated the loss of the Divine image, and that glorious innocence, bestowed on our first parents. Man was then pure from all inordinate desires and evil propensities, so that he was not ashamed of his natural nakedness; for he knew no sin, and consequently experienced no shame. This invaluable jewel we lost in Adam; at his fall, we, as it were, immediately fell among thieves; who stripped us naked, deprived our souls of this precious ornament, and placed us in such a condition that we may well be ashamed of our nakedness.

But secondly, he has likewise hereby obtained for us a garment to cover the nakedness of our souls; which was prefigured by the coats of skins, which God made for our first parents, after their eyes became opened, so as to perceive that they were naked, (Gen. iii. 21.) Jesus Christ himself is, in Scripture, represented as a garment, which we are to put on; 'Put ye on the Lord Jesus, (Rom. xiii. 14.) As many of you as have been baptized in Christ have put

on Christ,' (Gal. iii. 27.) But on what account the sacred person of Jesus Christ is considered under the emblem of a garment, we are informed by several other passages in Scripture; for it speaks of a 'Garment of salvation, and a robe of righteousness,' (Isaiah lxi. 10, &c.) But the righteousness of Christ is nothing but his perfect obedience, by which he has fulfilled whatever the sinner was to have done, to acquire a right to eternal life; and suffered all that the sinner was to have suffered, by making atonement to the Divine justice for the offences committed against it. Now, as this righteousness is imputed by God to the penitent sinner, and accepted by him through faith; so it may very properly be compared to a garment, since it is of the same use to the soul, as a garment is to the body. For as a garment covers the nakedness of the body, preserves it from heat and cold, and both cherishes and adorns it. So likewise the righteousness of Jesus Christ covers the shameful nakedness of the soul, (Psalm xxxii. 1. Rev. iii. 18.) It protects the soul against the heat of Divine wrath, and the howlings and gnashings of teeth of the damned; it warms and kindles in believers an ardent love and gratitude towards God, who, for their sake, has not spared his only begotten Son. Lastly, it is such a glorious ornament to the soul, that, in this dress, it need not be ashamed to make its appearance before the throne of God, and to have fellowship with the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. But as the human body can receive no benefit from a garment without putting it on; so must the righteousness of Jesus Christ be put on, before it can cover, protect, warm, and adorn the soul. Now it is put on, when the soul through faith and love becomes united with Christ Jesus, and by obeying his divine precepts, brings forth the fruit of good living; so that putting on the Lord Jesus, includes both our justification and sanctification.

In justification, the righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to us at the Divine tribunal, and received by us through faith; so that God no longer looks on us as we are in ourselves, in our corrupt sinful nature, but as we are in Jesus Christ, the Son of his love, in whom his soul is well pleased. In sanctification, the Spirit of Christ also works in us an active righteousness, whereby that faith, by which we put on Christ as our garment, now produces in the soul all the fruits of the Spirit, and good works; and this is called in Scripture, 'putting on the new man, (Eph. iv. 24.) putting on bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering,' (Col. iii. 12.) Thus Christ obtained for us a splendid robe of salvation; so that by putting on the garment of our first-born Brother, we happily inherit the blessing. This garment is of the same nature with the coat of the Lord Jesus; because it is not to be divided, but must be put on entire. Christ is not only made our righteousness, but likewise our sanctification, (Cor. i. 30.) and therefore they, who are for having only his righteousness as a covering for sin, but deny his sanctifying power, and do not seek after holiness, as it were rend Christ's coat, and are worse than these Pagan soldiers.

Thirdly, our blessed Saviour has acquired for us a robe of glory; for, when the use of food and raiment shall be superceded, our glorified bodies shall be adorned with a heavenly effulgence. To this St. Paul alludes in these words: 'We have a desire to be clothed upon with our house, which is from heaven,' (2 Cor. v. 2.)

Moreover, our dear Mediator, by these ignominious circumstances, has sanctified the similar sufferings of his children, and sweetened them with superabundant consolations.

1. He has sanctified their bodily nakedness; especially in times of persecution, when they are deprived of all their goods, and are obliged to go about almost

naked, and destitute of every thing, (Heb. xi. 37. 1 Cor. iv. 11.)

2. He has sanctified the sufferings of Christians, when they are stripped by the executioner, stretched out on the rack, given up to the brutality of insolent wretches; or when painful or inhuman outrages are committed on their dead bodies.

3. He has sanctified to his servants the spoiling of their goods for his sake, when they must see what of right belongs to them or their relations withheld from them, or taken away, by the unjust violence of strangers.

4. He has sanctified the state of our spiritual nakedness, when the soul is stripped of what it accounted its dearest property, its covering, ornament, and glory; when it lies in extreme indigence, without comfort, strength, tranquility, or joy; and when all it has to support itself is a word of the Divine promise.

Lastly, The Son of God, by this part of his sufferings, has left us an example, which we are to follow.

1. He instructs us how ready we ought to be, to suffer ourselves, when God requires it, to be stripped of all temporal things.

2. He teaches us that we should likewise give our cloak or upper garment to those who would take our coat, rather than sin by revenging ourselves; and that we should rather suffer injustice than do an injury.

3. He enjoins us to part with some of our substance in covering others, and particularly in clothing his persecuted servants.

THE PRAYER.

O FAITHFUL Saviour! we thank thee for all those salutary truths, which we have now learned from two particular circumstances attending thy passion. Praised be thy name, who by the title on thy cross hast given us to understand that, even in thy death,

thou didst still remain our Jesus, our Saviour, and our King. Make us partakers of those blessings which thou hast procured for us by thy sufferings. May we be truly sensible of the shame of our spiritual nakedness. Grant that we may know the insufficiency of our own righteousness, and desire to be clothed by thy righteousness here; so that, after laying aside the garment of our flesh, we may be arrayed in the effulgent robe of heavenly glory hereafter. Amen.

CONSIDERATION VI.

THE MENTAL SUFFERINGS OF JESUS CHRIST ON THE CROSS.

'AND the people stood beholding; and they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself; if thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief Priests, mocking him with the Scribes and Elders, said, He saved others, himself he cannot save. If he be the Christ, the King of Israel, the chosen of God, let him save himself, and now come down from the cross, that we may see it, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him; for he said, I am the Son of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him and offering him vinegar; and saying, If thou be the King of the Jews, save thyself. The thieves also, who were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. And one of the malefactors, who were hanged, railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us,' (Matt. xxvii. 39—44. Mark xv. 29—32. Luke xxxiii. 35, 36. 37, 39.)

This part of the history of the passion exhibits to us the mental sufferings of our blessed Lord. Such outrageous indignities, as were offered Christ on the

cross, may not improperly be called the crucifixion of his soul. For, if the nails that were driven through his hands and feet put him to the most sensible pain; the mockeries, insults, and invectives, which penetrated into his heart, and were levelled at him like poisonous and fiery darts, must have occasioned the greater torture to his unspotted soul. David complains, that 'as with a sword in his bones, his enemies reproach him, while they daily say unto him, Where is now thy God?' It is beyond the comprehension of all human understanding what the Son of David felt in his soul, when he was, as it were, set up as a butt for reproaches, and when so many tongues, set on fire of hell, discharged their mockeries against him; which David compares to sharp arrows of the mighty, (Psalm cxx. 4.) If St. Paul says of apostates, that they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame, (Heb. vi. 6.) he may very justly be said to have been as it were crucified by those horrid blasphemies, revilings, and mockeries, which he heard on the cross.

In the preceding sufferings of Christ, all sorts of men had exercised their tongues in the most virulent manner, and yielded them up as tools to satan, in order to give the most sensible wounds to the Son of God. The tongue of Judas had betrayed him, and pointed him out to his enemies by that hypocritical salutation, Hail Master! Peter's tongue had denied him with curses and imprecations. The tongues of the false witnesses had slandered him. The tongues of the High Priest Caiaphas, and of the other members of the Sanhedrim, had condemned him as a blasphemer; had falsely accused him before Pilate and Herod, and charged him with many enormous crimes. The tongues of the officers of the Council had ridiculed his prophetical office, and the tongues of the Roman soldiers his regal dignity. The tongue of Herod had insulted him by several impertinent and insolent questions. The tongue of Pilate had pro-

nounced sentence on him, and ordered him to be scourged and put to death. The tongues of the whole Jewish people had cried, Crucify him! Crucify him! And now, when he was actually fastened on the cross, and the hands of his enemies were in a manner tired, their envenomed tongues were the more virulent in venting all manner of reproach and contumely against him. These, the spirit of darkness and lies filled with the venom of the infernal dragon; and by these he endeavoured to make his last attempt on the soul of our blessed Lord, who at present was to feel the wrath of God in the highest degree. We shall therefore make some remarks on these mockeries, by which the soul of our holy Redeemer was assaulted; and draw some inferences from them for our edification. For this end, we shall,

First, Take notice of the authors of these taunting reflections against the blessed Jesus.

Secondly, The instruments with which they reviled and insulted him.

I. As to the persons who reviled our blessed Saviour on the cross, four sorts of men were particularly concerned in the guilt; and these were,

1. The people.
2. The rulers of the Jews.
3. The Roman soldiers.
4. The malefactors who were crucified with him.

1. The Jewish people, or the multitude who stood about the cross of Christ, were guilty of this enormous sin. We have observed before, that our blessed Saviour was followed to the place of crucifixion by a great multitude of people; that they might entertain their eyes with this bloody spectacle. Hence it is probable, that not only Mount Golgotha, but all the adjacent eminences were covered with spectators; especially as Jerusalem was then filled with an innumerable concourse of idle and curious people, on account of the Passover. [Josephus, in his history of the Jewish war, says that at one passover three

millions of souls were assembled at Jerusalem. Book II. Chap. III.] Then was seen in the great Antitype, the accomplishment of what was typically done on the annual feast of atonement; for the whole congregation of the children of Israel stood round the High Priest, when he offered the sacrifice for the sins of the people. Thus the High Priest over the house of God, at the time when he offered himself on the cross to his heavenly Father, was surrounded by a vast multitude of people; who, according to the Divine decree, were to be witnesses of this general sacrifice. Some of the people stood at a distance, and looked on; the curiosity of others led them to approach nearer to the cross, that they might have a more distinct view of Jesus; and these were the persons who reviled him. For as it was customary, in stoning an Israelite, for every one present to throw a stone at the malefactor; so here, likewise, none of the spectators of Christ's crucifixion, who stood near, omitted to throw a stone of invective against him.

2. The next who were involved in this guilt were the rulers of the people; or, as they are specified by St. Matthew, the chief Priests, the Scribes, and the Elders, (Chap. xxvii. 41) In some Greek copies, the Pharisees are likewise mentioned, who, we may be sure, were not far off. Thus the civil and ecclesiastical chiefs of the Jewish nation were here present. These persons, on account of the approaching passover, had, according to the Mosaic law, affairs of a very different nature to attend. Besides, this polluted place of execution ill suited those pretended scrupulous consciences, which, but six hours before, would not permit these hypocrites to set a foot within a Pagan court of justic, lest they should be defiled. But an inhuman rancour against Jesus had brought them hither, along with the rabble. Nay, they were not only the nearest spectators at the time of the crucifixion, but remained at the cross for some time after; which they did partly, that, by their presence they

might prevent any of the people from coming to succour Jesus, and take him from the cross; and partly, that they might feast their savage eyes with this bloody sacrifice, and increase his sufferings with all kind of insults and blasphemies, after the soldiers had nailed his body to the cross. But God, without having any share in these wicked and detestable views, by his secret providence detained them there; that they might be witnesses of the sufferings of Christ on Mount Golgotha, and of the uncommon patience, mildness, and piety which he displayed, to the disgrace of his enemies, who had condemned him as a blasphemer. Moreover, the Elders of the people, by standing about the cross, may put us in mind of the type of Christ, exhibited by the rock which was struck in the presence ofall the Elders of Israel, (Exod. xvii. 6.) and of the builders, who would reject the head-stone of the corner, (Psalm cxviii. 32.)

3. The Roman soldiers likewise shared in his guilt; for St. Luke (Luke xxiii. 36.) observes, that the soldiers also mocked him. In the judgment-hall of Pilate, they had already committed several outrages against him, and vexed our Saviour's righteous soul by all manner of prophane and contumelious reflections. However, they were so far from having exhausted their stock of cruel mockeries, that they still make the crucified Jesus the object of their farther ridicule. We do not indeed find, that they were the first in the revilings at the place of crucifixion. It was the Jews and their rulers who led the way, and thus by their wicked example, the Gentiles were incited to repeat their opprobrious language and insults.

4. Lastly, The malefactors who were crucified with him were also guilty of this sin. For St. Matthew says, 'The thieves also, who were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth;' from which words one would be apt to conclude, that both malefactors, who were on his right hand and on his left, concurred in reviling our blessed Saviour. But St.

Luke expressly says, that one of the malefactors railed on him, but that he was rebuked by the other. Hence it is not improbable, that the other also reviled him at first; but soon after entertained better thoughts of Jesus, reproved his companion, and immediately became a conver to our blessed Lord. This seeming inconsistence may also be solved in the following manner. The Evangelist, intending to relate the horrid mockeries, which the Lord of Glory suffered from all ranks of people while he hung on the cross, first mentions the revilings of the people. They observe, in the next place, how the Rulers and Elders reviled him, and how the spirit of mockery was by their means also stirred up in the Roman soldiers. Lastly, they add, that he was also reviled and insulted even by the robbers and murderers, who were crucified with him. Thus, it is usual to speak sometimes, as if a thing was done by many, when perhaps the fact was done only by one person of a certain rank or age. For instance; if a harmless old man happens to be abused in the public streets by a petulant boy, it is not improper to say, this poor man in his old age is the sport of children; though only one single boy had insulted him. Thus also St. Matthew and St. Mark might very well say, that Jesus was reviled even by murderers and robbers; though, according to St. Luke's account, only one of the malefactors behaved in such a wicked manner. From this circumstance of our Saviour's passion, we shall deduce the following truths.

First, Jesus Christ has suffered himself to be mocked and abused by all ranks of men, that he might deliver all from the spirit of mockery and abuse.

It is a terrible consideration to think, that all sorts of spectators sharpened their tongues, and pointed them with bitter invectives against the ever glorious Son of God. He was mocked by Jews and Gentiles, by young and old, by the learned and ignorant, by teachers and hearers, by the clergy and magistrates,

by private men and soldiers. Thus all the waves and floods of abuse went over the soul of our blessed Lord with combined violence. But it may here be asked, what could move the Divine wisdom to permit so many scoffers to assault our blessed Saviour with their envenomed tongues? It was,

1. To shew in this mirror that corrupt inclination of making a mock of the distressed and afflicted, and of ridiculing the most sacred persons and things, which has by the fall generally infected the human heart, and prevails in every rank, age, and sex. What St. Paul says of carnal men, namely, that 'the poison of asps is under their lips,' (Rom. iii. 13.) displays itself particularly in the abominable mockeries and invectives, which were poured forth by the engines of satan against our blessed Lord. But,

2. The Son of God intended, by patiently submitting to these keen arrows of reproach and mockery, to procure forgiveness of such grievous sins to those who commit them whether they be Jews or Gentiles; so that every one who is guilty, and penitently acknowledges these heinous sins, heartily bewailing, and sincerely abhorring them, may find remission of them by the merits and intercession of Christ.

3. He has hereby delivered from the bonds and fetters of the spirit of mockery, all those, who are but willing to be released, and apply to him for succour, with a firm resolution of amendment.

Secondly, The same sins may be committed by different persons; and yet the guilt may be greater in some than in others.

Here both Jews and Gentiles reviled and mocked our blessed Saviour; but it is certain, that the Jews sinned much more grievously than the Gentiles; since they mocked that Jesus, whom they might have known to be the Messiah and the Son of God, from the writings of the prophets. Besides, our blessed Lord had hitherto conversed with, and lived among

them, and done many surprising miracles to the souls and bodies of their countrymen. They were likewise obliged, as the peculiar people of God, to set a better example to the uncircumcised Gentiles. Nay, we find that the chief Priests also mocked him, together with the people; but it is evident that the former were guilty of a greater crime than the latter. For Christ had before reproved them, (Luke xvi. 14, 15.) for their wicked derisions. Besides, they pretended to have the key of knowledge, and, from the prophetical writings, consequently ought to have been better informed concerning the Messiah's state of humiliation. On the contrary, they should have reproved the scoffing multitude, and withheld them from increasing the sorrows of the afflicted; instead of beginning the railing and mockery, and inciting the people to scoff and inveigh against Christ by their ill example.

Thirdly, Punishment in itself makes no criminal better without the concurrence of Divine grace.

An instance of this is here seen in one of the robbers, who, notwithstanding all his pains, joined with those who mocked the blessed Jesus; and as his hands were bound, so that he could not lay hold on the sacred person of Christ, he made his tongue, as it were, the bow to discharge the envenomed arrows of abuse and mockery against him. Could the punishment inflicted by the law produce amendment, this malefactor would have been converted as well as the other. But a contrary effect not only happened in the instance before us, but may be observed every day. Neither the sword, the gallows, nor the wheel, have the power of converting a criminal, unless grace interposes to change and molify the heart. Nay, it is often seen that profligate sinners are rather hardened than reformed, not only by temporal punishments, but even by Divine chastisements. Such is the corruption of human nature! so deeply rooted in man is the love of, and propensity to sin! O that there may be none who read these pages, to whom this complaint of the

prophet may be applied: 'Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction; they have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refused to return,' (Jer. v. 3.)

II. We come, in the next place, to consider the instruments which occasioned our blessed Lord's mental sufferings on the cross. These were,

1. Bold and insulting looks.
2. Deriding gestures.
3. Abusive words.

1. Bold and audacious looks darted from the eyes of the people; for St. Luke says, 'the people stood beholding, and the rulers also with them derided him, &c.' Probably this melancholy spectacle was an entertainment to many of them; and their insolent eyes, which ought to have wept blood on account of the pain and tortures which the Lord of Glory endured, sparkled with a malignant joy at his bitter pains. It is usual for the people generally to express a concern for malefactors under sentence of death, since they partake the same nature. And this sympathetic concern and pity is the greater, when they see a man languishing in the extreme tortures of a lingering death. But there was not the least traces of any such humane concern to be found in the enemies of Christ. How must his generous soul have been affected with the rudeness, insolence, and cruelty, which appeared in the looks of so many thousands of inhuman spectators! Of this the Messiah had long before complained by the mouth of David, (Psalm xx. 17.) in these words: 'They stand staring and looking upon me: They opened their mouth wide against me, and said, 'Aha! Aha!' (Psalm xxxv. 21.) But these looks were agravated

2. By the deriding gestures of the people who passed by: For St. Matthew and St. Mark observe, that they who passed by reviled him, wagging their heads.' This gesture, among the Jews and other

eastern nations, was expressive of the utmost contempt, In the second book of Kings it is said, (Chap. xix. 21.) 'The virgin, the daughter of Sion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken the head at thee.' From several other passages of Scripture, (See Job xvi. 4.) it appears, that the shaking of the head was used as a mark of the greatest contempt. But it is remarkable, that it was foretold that the crucified Messiah would experience this kind of mockery: For he is represented in the Psalms making this complaint: 'All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, and shake the head,' (Psalm xxii. 7.) I became also a reproach unto them; when they looked upon me, they shaked their heads,' (Psalm cix. 25.) St. Luke says of the rulers of the people, that they also derided him, (Luke xxiii. 35.) which word in the original properly signifies, by turning up the nose, to express a look of disdain and derision. The soldiers also, by way of mockery, came unto him, and offered him vinegar or sour wine, instead of a cordial to support his spirits which were now quite exhausted. Probably these were not all the deriding gestures which the Son of God beheld, but are set down only as specimens of the malice and barbarity of his enemies. How must this express Image of the Deity have grieved to see the odious disguise of Satan in the attitudes, grimaces, and gestures of these his slaves! That it was very painful to his soul may be sufficiently inferred from the bitter complaints, ascribed to the the Messiah in the book of Psalms, on account of this scurrilous wickedness of his enemies. To these insulting looks and deriding gestures were likewise added,

3. Abusive words and invectives; some of which, the three Evangelists St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke concludes his account of the mockeries and insulting speeches made against Christ in Caiaphas's house, with these words: 'And many other things

blasphemously spake they against him,' (Luke xxii. 65.) Hence we may conclude that this specimen of the abusive words, which our blessed Saviour was obliged to hear on the cross, were but a part of the invectives poured out against him. Now all these opprobrious words are to be looked on as so many envenomed arrows, discharged against the heart of the blessed Jesus by the prince of darkness, by means of the tongues of these scoffers. His soul, indeed, was not in the least polluted by them, but it was extremely wounded and tortured. In these opprobrious words, they,

First, Derided his truth and omnipotence, saying, 'Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days; save thyself and come down from the cross!' The preceding night, when Jesus stood before the Sanhedrim, the Jews had very much abused these words of our blessed Lord, and scandalously perverted them by the tongues of their false witnesses. Here they are again cast in his teeth; and it is not improbable that those very false witnesses, who had slanderously perverted these innocent words of Jesus, here began again to reproach him with the same words which were immediately catched by others among the multitude, who seconded those perjured scoffers in their revilings. By this, their intention was to expose our blessed Lord as a chimerical boaster, and one who pretended to perform great things, when at the same time, he was not able to make good his mighty pretensions. Thus they impiously perverted his words, and ridiculed his omnipotence. Thus the Eternal Truth submitted to pass for a liar, and the power of the Most High was accounted a vain, impotent man.

Secondly, They derided the honour of the eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ. 'They who passed by said, if thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.' But in this the chief Priests and Elders had already set them a pattern by saying, 'If he be Christ,

the chosen of God, let him come down from the cross ;—for he said, I am the Son of God.' Thus as our blessed Saviour had twice confessed before the Sanhedrim, that he was the Son of God; so was he twice mocked and ridiculed for it on the cross; namely, by the people, and by their teachers. Satan had formerly begun his temptation with this article, saying, 'If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down,' (Matt. iv. 6.) Here the instruments of satan say, 'If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.' From the resemblance betwixt these words, it is manifest, that satan himself vented them here by his engines, and thus challenged the Son of God, to come down from the cross, and attest the truth of his eternal Sonship by a miracle. That very action would, on the contrary, have proved him not to be the obedient Son of the heavenly Father. For by coming down alive from the cross, on which he was to die, he would have disobeyed his Father; who required from him obedience unto death, even the death of the cross.

Thirdly, These miscreants ridiculed the Divine miracles wrought by our blessed Lord, by which he had sealed his doctrines, and relieved such multitudes of unhappy persons. For the rulers of the people, by saying, 'He has saved others, himself he cannot save,' intended to render the truth of all his former miracles suspected, and to represent them as mere juggle or magical performances. This was the inference they drew, that if his miracles proceeded from God, he would be able to help himself as well as others; but it was plain he could not help himself, and therefore his miracles did not proceed from God. As if they had said to the people who doubtless crowded about these eminent persons, 'see what a pretended worker of miracles Jesus is, who was followed by thousands: He has helped others; but now he cannot help himself in this extremity. Does not this plainly shew that he is a cheat, who absolutely impos-

ed on your senses by sham miracles?' But it is very remarkable, that our blessed Lord in the very first year of his ministry had foretold, that he should one day be thus insulted: 'Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself,' (Luke iv. 23.) This prophecy of the Lord Jesus was here fulfilled by his enemies; so that the sting of this offence is taken away. Thus our blessed Saviour did not want power to help himself, and yet did not exert that power, that he might help us; and consequently he preferred our deliverance to his own.

Fourthly, Our blessed Lord's confidence in his heavenly Father was here ridiculed. 'He trusted in God say the rulers of the people, let him deliver him now, if he will have him', *i. e.* if God has pleasure in him, and acknowledges him for his Son; 'For he said, I am the Son of God.' They recollected that Christ, in his Divine discourses, had often expressed a singular confidence in his heavenly Father, and declared that he loved him, (John iii. 35. viii. 16, 29, 50, 54. xvi. 32, &c.) that he sought and promoted his honour: that he did not leave him alone; that he was with him, and assisted him, &c. From such expressions these malignant spiders suck the poison of calumny; and thus endeavour to overset our Saviour's confidence in his Father, and as it were to cut away the anchor, by which the bark of his hope was still secured, though quite covered with outrageous waves, tossed in the most dreadful tempest. It is further remarkable, that almost the very words used by these scoffers are found in the Psalms, where the Messiah is represented complaining, that his enemies say of him, 'He trusted in the Lord that he would deliver him; let him deliver him, if he delight in him.' (Psalm xxii. 8.) Thus they unknowingly fulfilled the Scripture by this impious speech.

Fifthly, They here ridiculed the kingly dignity of Jesus Christ. For the chief Priests and Elders said, 'Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the

cross, that we may see and believe.' The Roman soldiers followed their impious example, and said, 'If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.' If thou intendest by thy military prowess to deliver the Jews from the dominion of the Romans, deliver thyself first, and thus give a proof of thy great power. Our blessed Saviour had acknowledged himself to be the King of Israel before Pilate; and upon this account Pilate, in the title on the cross, stiled him, JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS. Now as it was out of the power of the chief Priests to erase the superscription, which was a great offence to them, and as they could not prevail on Pilate to alter it; this put them on ridiculing it, by saying, If he be the King of Israel, as he is stiled in the superscription over his head, written in three languages, let him prove it by coming down from the cross. To this they added, by way of derision, a promise that then they would believe on him; though at the same time nothing was farther from their thoughts. And, indeed, if Christ, in order to induce them to believe on him, had actually descended from the cross, they would in all probability have imputed this miracle likewise to sorcery.

Sixthly and lastly, Our blessed Lord's office, of Messiah was ridiculed by these miscreants; the chief Priests cried out, 'Let him save himself, if he be the Christ, or Messiah.' One of the crucified malefactors took this from their abusive mouths, and railed on him, saying 'If thou be Christ save thyself and us.' As if he had said, as thou didst pretend to be the Messiah, help thyself and us; for if thou wilt come down from the cross, surely thou wilt not leave us thy fellow-sufferers behind. Thus whatever was venerable, great, and glorious in the person of the Lord Jesus was here the subject of the most scurrilous reflections of profane scoffers. His Omnipotence, his eternal Sonship, his Divinity, his Divine miracles, his confidence in his heavenly Father, his

regal dignity, and his office of Messiah, were all exposed to ridicule and mockery. We shall conclude this consideration by deducing the following truths from what has been said on this subject.

1. The opprobrious words, by which the blessed Jesus was insulted, are to be accounted among satan's severe temptations.

When satan, at the beginning of our Saviour's ministry, had been repulsed by our Lord, it is said, 'he departed from him for a season,' (Luke iv. 13.) Now, at the close of his life, he returns to the charge, and enters into these his engines, as he anciently did into Goliath, to prompt them to blaspheme the God of Israel. His design was, by these abusive and deriding words, to try whether he could throw our blessed Lord's temper into some disorder, and move him to a passionate impatience; or whether he could excite in him a desire of giving a proof of his omnipotence, by coming down from the cross; by which means the whole counsel of God, concerning our salvation, would have been frustrated, and the work of redemption would have miscarried. But as the Son of God remained faithful in the first trial, which he underwent immediately after his baptism; so he shewed the same firmness in this last encounter on the cross. But the great Captain of our salvation submitted to this trial, that he might triumph over satan, notwithstanding his utmost efforts and severest outrages; that he might bruise his head, extract the venomous sting of his temptations; and obtain for us strength to remain firm in all trials, and to come off more than conquerors.

2. When the faithful servants of God are under outward sufferings, satan and his engines are most busy to vex their minds with opprobrious words, and insolent challenges.

Thus, no sooner was the Son of God nailed to the cross, than his soul was assaulted by the revilings of his enemies. This is the way satan and his engines frequently proceed with Christ's members. When

they are, as it were, externally hanging on the cross; when all the waves of affliction and persecutions are running over them; then the tongues of their persecutors discharge their poisonous arrows of calumny at them. But great will be the reward of those, who in this particular are made like unto Christ, the first-born among many brethren. They must, after his great example, keep silence, and amidst all the rage and calumny of the world, possess their souls in patience; and at last all will end in conquest and triumph.

3. The abuses which the world pours forth against Christ and his members, will give less offence when the foul springs of them are laid open.

These scoffs and mockeries in some men proceed from mere levity, as it is here said of some, that they reviled Jesus as they passed by. Thus many hastily pass by the cross of Christ and the sufferings of his members, like a rapid stream, and immediately turn their thoughts from them. But such transient looks produce only a hasty judgment, evil imaginations, and blasphemous motions; from all which he is secure, who endeavours to possess his mind in peace and tranquility. In others such invectives are dictated by envy and hatred, as Jacob's sons envied Joseph for his father's particular love to him, and mocked him as a dreamer, (Gen. xxxvii. 4, 19. Acts vii. 9) Thus the chief Priests and Scribes were offended at Jesus; because he said he was the Son of God, and frequently mentioned the singular love that his heavenly Father bore towards him. This envious disposition had before prompted them to take up stones to cast at him; (John viii. 59.) and the same malignant passion now moved their tongues to eject these deriding sarcasms. Others again have so accustomed themselves to opprobrious language, that it is become a second nature to them: and this might well be said of the Scribes and Pharisees, whose tongues were so possessed by the spirit of calumny, that they were quite incapable of passing any judgment upon Jesus that

was consistent with truth or charity. Some men indeed revile out of complaisance to others, as the people and the soldiers did, in the instance before us; and others are prompted to it by despair, as one of the malefactors, who were crucified with our blessed Saviour, was. Now who will mind the abuses of the world, or take offence at them, since the cause of them is not in the reviled servants of God, but in the revilers themselves, and the wicked dispositions of their minds? For these wretched slaves of satan are like the waves of a troubled sea, foaming up their own disgrace.

THE PRAYER.

Now we thank thee, O dear Redeemer, who hast not only suffered thy body to be crucified, but wast also wounded and vexed in thy soul, by envenomed arrows from so many abusive tongues, that thou mightest heal us in body and soul. Let this part of thy sufferings work in us a serious abhorrence of all deriding words, looks, and jestures; and grant that we may patiently suffer all the waves of undeserved abuses to pass over us with united violence; and that in all sufferings we may remain faithful, and willingly submit to be reproached with thee, that we also may be made partakers of thy glory. Amen.

CONSIDERATION VII.

THE GIFTS CONFERRED BY THE LORD JESUS, WHILE HE HUNG ON THE CROSS.

'BUT the other malefactor answering, rebuked him [who railed on Jesus] saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly: for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou

comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily, I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy Son! then saith he to the disciple, behold thy mother! and from that hour this disciple took her unto his own home,' (Luke xxiii. 39—43. John xix. 25—27.)

The blessed Jesus was fastened to the cross quite naked, and stripped of every thing; his very clothes, which had till then been his only property, being taken from him by the soldiers. Nevertheless we may observe, how in this state of extreme poverty and abasement he distributed such noble gifts, as none of the rich and powerful of this world can bestow. For,

First, On a believing and penitent sinner he bestows the happiness of Paradise.

Secondly, To his disconsolate mother he gives a faithful Son.

Thirdly, To John, his beloved disciple, he gives a tender affectionate mother.

I. The crucified Jesus confers Paradise on a penitent and believing sinner. Here we are to consider,

1. The person who obtained this transcendent gift.
2. The gift itself.

The person who obtained this favour is described according to his former and present condition.

According to his former course of life, he was a robber and murderer. Thus he had flagrantly transgressed the sixth and eighth Commandments of the supreme Legislator. It is probable that he was born and educated in the Jewish Church; for, if he had been a Gentile, he would have known nothing of the kingdom of the Messiah, or of Paradise. But, as the Jewish Church was then extremely corrupted, and

the land of Judea was over-run with a set of seditious banditti, who were for shaking off the Roman yoke, and at the same time gave themselves up to live by rapine and plunder, so that the roads were very unsafe for travellers; this man had probably belonged to one of these profligate gangs. Whether he had followed this course of life many years, or whether, after he had been concerned only in one or two enterprizes of this nature, the Roman soldiers had taken him prisoner in the fact, is uncertain; for there is nothing further said of his former circumstances. But it is not altogether improbable, that before he fell in company with such a lawless crew, he might have mixed with the multitudes, and have heard the discourses of our blessed Lord, and seen him perform many miracles; or at least he might have heard many wonderful things of Jesus of Nazareth from others. And though his strong propensity to wickedness had, for the present, suppressed all the good motions they might have caused in him; yet afterwards, amidst the leisure and reflections of his confinement in prison, they may have worked on his heart. For a grain of the Divine Word frequently falls on a savage, uncultivated soil; so that it produces no fruit till many years after, when sufferings and afflictions cause it to spring up.

As to this malefactor's present state, while he hung on the cross, it was indeed outwardly very wretched; for he was in great tortures, and dying the most cruel ignominious death: but inwardly, his heart was under the influence of the Holy Spirit, who was producing in him repentance and faith, and made use of his tongue as the instrument to glorify the crucified Jesus, in the extremity of his sufferings and reproach.

Of this malefactor's repentance, indeed, the Evangelists give no express account; but it is sufficiently apparent from his reproof to his fellow-sufferer. For that shews,

First, An abhorrence and hatred against sin; which prompted him to check his companion for his cruel abuse of the crucified Jesus. For by his reproof, he signified that he inwardly detested sin; since no man would he thus so zealous in rebuking the sin of another, who did not seriously hate and repent of his own sins. Thus a holy zeal, and indignation against wickedness, is numbered amongst the effects of Godly sorrow by the Apostle. (2 Cor. vii. 12.)

Secondly, It shewed a devout fear of God; for he says to his companion, 'Dost not THOU fear God?' Now this man would never have upbraided another for not fearing God, if his own heart had been void of that Godly fear. Would not his own conscience have called out to him much louder than he did to his comrade, dost not thou thyself fear God? had his delight been still in wickedness, the fear of God would not have been before his eyes, (Psalm xxxvi. 1. Rom. iii. 18.) But having now a deep sense of the abomination of sin, his mind was likewise deeply impressed with the majesty, holiness, and justice of God. As he was displeased because the other sinned in reviling Christ, so he was highly displeased that he should shew so little fear and reverence for the living God, the Judge of all flesh.

Thirdly, His discourse to his comrade shews likewise a desire of reforming his neighbour, and bringing him from his error into a better way. He thinks it strange that his abandoned companion could revile Jesus, when he himself was in the same condemnation; being both sentenced by the civil power, to suffer the same ignominious death. He did not wonder that the spectators who stood beneath about the cross should revile our Lord; but he thought it very amazing and horrible, that a wretch who was nailed to the cross, and within a few hours of giving up the ghost, should think of sharpening his envenomed tongue against Jesus. He therefore rebukes this hardened railer; and would fain bring him to a better

way of thinking, by impressing on his mind the fear of God, and of the rigour of his just judgment, which was now poured upon him. Now to endeavour to gain others, and bring them into the right way, is a sign of a penitent mind; as appears from the penitent Psalmist, who says, 'then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee,' (Ps. li. 13.) In these words of the malefactor appears,

Fourthly, A vindication of the Divine justice: For he adds, 'and we indeed justly:' that we hang betwixt heaven and earth as a curse, and abomination is no injustice done to us. Though the sentence is hard, and the death painful; yet is it no more than we by our crimes have deserved. He vindicates not only the justice of the civil magistrate, who inflicted this punishment; but likewise the justice of God, whose Minister and Avenger the Sovereign is, to execute wrath upon him that doth evil. (Rom. xiii. 4.)

Lastly, These words of the malefactor to his companion contain,

Fifthly, An open confession of the crimes he had committed: 'for we receive the due reward of our deeds.' Here indeed he does not particularly specify the several crimes he had been guilty of, but speaks of them in general terms, without palliating his offences, without complaining that there is no proportion betwixt his punishment and his crime, and without throwing any blame on others for seducing him; however owns himself a notorious criminal, pleads guilty, and confesses that he well deserved this punishment, which he therefore bears with patience and resignation.

These were the five unexceptionable proofs of the genuineness and sincerity of this man's repentance. But his faith, which the Holy Ghost at the same time kindled in his heart, was likewise manifested by the following signs.

1. By vindicating our blessed Lord; for he not only reproves the blasphemies of his wicked fel-

low-sufferer, but gives a public testimony of the perfect innocence of Jesus, in these words: 'but this Man hath done nothing amiss.' As if he had said, He is not only innocent of the faults which are laid to his charge; but in his whole life, has done nothing amiss, nor so much as committed any indiscretion which deserves even a verbal chastisement, much less such a dreadful punishment as crucifixion. Thus he looks on our blessed Saviour as a holy, innocent, and undefiled person, and infinitely separated from all sinners. Nay, he was not only a witness, but pleaded in behalf of our Saviour's innocence; and that in the presence of so many great, powerful, and respected slanderers and blasphemers, whom he here publicly contradicts by confuting their calumnies.

2. He manifests his faith by a confidential address to our blessed Saviour; to whom he not only turns his face, but likewise his heart, and says, 'Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.' Hitherto he had spoke only to his wicked companion, and by reproving him, endeavoured to bring him to thoughts of repentance. But now, he turns from him and the rest of the spectators, and full of faith and reverence addresses himself to Jesus, against whom innumerable tongues were discharging their rancour in opprobrious revilings. Probably, what first touched the heart of this man was the prayer of Christ, when nailed to the cross; wherein he interceded for his enemies, saying, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.' These pathetic words kindled in his pathetic soul a spark of faith, love, and confidence towards the Lord Jesus, which declared itself in this humble request, 'Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.'

3. He manifests his faith by an acknowledgment of the regal dignity and kingdom of Jesus Christ. Though Christ was in his lowest abasement, he not only calls him Lord, but also ascribes to him a kingdom; and such a kingdom as he was to enter upon,

and possess after his death. He confides in him who had not a garment to cover his nakedness; in him, who had been even condemned to the ignominious death of the cross, as a king who had a real kingdom, in which he was to triumph and reign to all eternity. By this request, the penitent malefactor contradicts all those who hitherto had ridiculed the kingdom of Christ; and glorifies the blessed Jesus at a time when his disciples were silent, and so confounded with fear, that they did not dare to acknowledge him for the King of Israel. Could he have done this, unless his mouth had been opened by the spirit of faith, without which 'no man can say, that JESUS is the LORD?' (1 Cor. xii. 3.) The same blessed spirit enabled him to believe in his heart, and confess with his mouth, that Jesus is the Lord, (Rom. x. 9.) He further manifests his faith,

4. By desiring a favour of the Lord Jesus, and recommending himself to his gracious remembrance. 'Lord remember me;' which words express his concern for his immortal soul, that was now to be separated very soon from his body by a violent death. He does not pray to be delivered from the cross, but for the salvation of his soul. Lastly, he manifests his faith,

5. By an humble resignation and poverty of spirit. He does not pray for any high station or post of honour in the kingdom of Christ; but only for his affectionate and favourable remembrance of him. He refers the rest to the love and wisdom of this spiritual King. Thus he was a signal instance, how soon the Spirit of Grace can accomplish its work, and bring it to maturity, in a soul that does not resist its sacred influence. Such instances also occur in the Acts of the Apostles; particularly in the jailer, who the very night he was going to lay violent hands on himself and commit suicide, was, with his whole family, brought to believe on the Lord Jesus.

What this gift was, which the crucified Jesus conferred on this person, we may learn from the following words: 'Verily, I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.' Thus the gift bestowed on the converted malefactor was nothing less than Paradise, that is, the desirable state to which the souls of the blessed or the spirits of just men made perfect, after their separation from the body, are admitted in the presence of God, together with all the heavenly solace appertaining to that happy state. This timorous humble sinner would not presume to pray, that the Lord Jesus would receive him into his kingdom; but only requested that he would be pleased to remember him, when he should one day take possession of his kingdom, and enter into his glory. But the Son of God immediately answers his request with the greatest kindness, and promises him that, on that very day, he should be with him in his kingdom; to which he gives the name of Paradise, in order to shew that he is the King not of an earthly, but of an heavenly and unperishable kingdom. Our blessed Lord by this answer likewise shews, that he is to be looked upon as the second Adam, who now by his actions and sufferings repaired the ruins caused by the transgression of the first Adam; and that he was to open again that Paradise, which our first parent had shut against himself, and all his unfortunate descendants. But as he now opens Paradise to this penitent sinner, he at the same time forgives him all his sins, by which he had deserved the punishment of hell; and includes him in the general pardon which, in his prayer on the cross, he had supplicated for sinners: nay, he presents him to his heavenly Father, as the first spoils which he had wrested on his cross from the hands of the devil. But that this terrified and trembling sinner, who was snatched as a brand out of the fire, might be the better assured of the accomplishment of the promise made him, he gives him his royal word: 'Verily, I say unto thee,' con-

firming his promise with his usual affirmative of Verily, or Amen. In his ministerial office, he used this affirmation as a true prophet; but now he uses it as a true king, in whose words all his faithful subjects might safely confide. This whole narrative is a pleasing mirror, in which we may behold many comfortable and salutary truths.

1. It is a mirror of the power of faith, working by repentance. Here it may be seen how faith alters a man; how it kindles a new light in his understanding; and clears the eyes of the mind, so as to penetrate through all the clouds of reproach into the glory of Jesus Christ, and through all obstacles into his benevolent heart; to make his way through all offences; to own Christ, even in his lowest abasement, to be the Almighty Prince of life and King of Glory; and, contrary to all outward appearance, to account his word true, and worthy of all acceptation. Here we may also see how it works in the penitent a hatred and abhorrence of sin, a desire after Christ, charity to his neighbour in endeavouring to gain him over, and an humble resignation. Lastly, we may here see how it extends its government over the tongue; so that the sinner publicly acknowledges his own guilt, God's mercy, and the innocence of Christ. It is not, however, to be denied, that in this converted malefactor something extraordinary was done; and that the spirit of faith in a short time completed in this man, as he had but a few hours more to live, what in the ordinary course of things it does slowly and gradually.

Come, all ye who boast of your faith in Christ, and place yourselves before this mirror of faith. Compare your faith with his faith, which manifested itself by so many precious fruits of the Spirit. Alas! how much cause will you find to be ashamed at the very great disparity, which will appear on the comparison. You have for so long a time heard the word of faith, and have had a thousand opportunities which this

poor malefactor had not; yet how far does he surpass you in the power of faith! How many of you, notwithstanding all your boasted faith, are still by your practices in unbelief. Your understanding is full of darkness, your will is swayed by the love of sin, is full of hatred to God, full of abhorrence to Christ and his reproach; and lastly, you give up your tongues to the evil spirit, by uttering all manner of injurious and opprobrious words. Lift up your eyes to Christ Jesus, who is now no longer on the cross, but on the throne of glory; dealing out gifts, and imparting the spirit of faith to those who pray for it. Implore him to implant in your hearts this exalted and living power of faith, of which you here see a pattern; and let that faith work in you, and be productive of every virtue.

2. In this mirror, the transcendent love which Christ bears to mankind is conspicuously displayed. Behold, how willing he is to receive the most wretched sinners who sincerely turn to him; who forget all those vices in which they hitherto sought their Paradise; who hunger after his grace, and desire nothing more than that he would think of them. How readily does he here hold out his hand, to rescue this sinner from destruction! no sooner does this malefactor turn to the Prince of Life, than he is not only discharged from the sentence of eternal death, but declared a denizon of Paradise!

Alas, trembling sinner! how canst thou hesitate a moment to give up thy heart to thy benign Saviour, who has appointed the felicities of Paradise for those who truly turn to him? dost thou doubt whether he will receive thee, or reject thee? Behold, in the instance before us, his uncommon willingness to fulfil the desire of the most wretched, but penitent, sinner. Do not wilfully defer thy conversion to the last moment of thy life. Think not, because this malefactor did not turn to Christ but a few hours before his death, that thou mayest safely follow his example, and put off thy repentance till thou art laid on the bed of death.

Remember, that this is the only instance in the whole Scriptures of the acceptance of such a late repentance. How absurd then would it be to ground thy hope on so extraordinary an instance? suppose it had once happened, that a person had leaped down from a high precipice without losing his life, would it be prudent to run the risk, and leap down after him? no less unwise, are they who make a handle of this comfortable example for falling presumptuously into sin, and put off their repentance till the hour of death. Too many by such an infatuation exclude themselves from heaven. Alas, to sin is in our power; but when we are once fallen, to abstain from sin, to repent and be converted, is beyond the natural power of man; it is the goodness of God that must lead us to repentance. Now if sinners have been deaf to the kind admonitions and chastisements of God, he will also be deaf to their cries in their dying moments. If a man defers his repentance to the last, and in the mean time rejects all the faithful admonitions of the Holy Spirit, God frequently withdraws his gracious influence; so that his heart becomes alike incapable either of receiving comfort, or of praying for Divine assistance. Besides, it is very probable, that this malefactor never had such an opportunity before; and now he no sooner sees the patience and resignation, and hears the powerful prayer and affectionate words of Christ, but immediately, instead of hardening his heart as his desperate companion did, he relents, acknowledges his guilt, and humbly seeks the favour of Christ. But with Christians it is quite otherwise. The Lord Jesus stands at the door of our hearts, and waits for admission. Besides, the day of our death often comes as a thief in the night, sudden and unexpected. At the hour of death, generally the heart of man is extremely afflicted, his body is full of inexpressible pains his soul is overwhelmed with anguish and terror, his mental powers languid and confused, so as to render him incapable of any regular action, or recollection of

the errors of his past life. Therefore repent in the day of grace, and use that precious time before it be elapsed.

3. The instance before us is also a mirror of the kingly glory of Jesus Christ, which here beams forth from amidst the clouds of the deepest abasement and ignominy. By this instane, our crucified Saviour demonstrates, that he has not only the keys of death and hell, with which he opens the abyss of eternal darkness for the despises of his grace, and shuts it, that his faithful servants may not fall into it; but also the keys of Paradise, and of the glorious mansions in his Father's house. This is a kind of prelude to the last Judgment; for Paradise is here promised to one malefactor; and shut against another, who is consigned to eternal misery. Acquaint yourselves, therefore betimes with this Lord of Paradise. Be not ashamed of having fellowship with him in his abasement, that he may not be ashamed of having fellowship with you, in his glory.

In this mirror we may see the manner of making a happy exit; and from hence we may learn, how to behave in our last moments. We must, after the example of this penitent malefactor,

First, Acknowledge our manifold sins, and confess that by them we have deserved God's wrath and displeasure, temporal death and eternal condemnation.

Secondly, From this terrfing thought we must turn ourselves to Jesus Christ, who alone blotteth out sin; and appeal from justice to grace, from wrath to mercy. We must pray to our Saviour to look on us with a favourable eye, as he looked on this malefactor, and to remember us in his kingdom of glory.

Thirdly, We must patiently bear the pains which God is pleased to inflict on us; and in order to alleviate them, we should fix our thoughts on that Paradise, which our dying Mediator has obtained for his faithful servants.

Fourthly, We must acknowledge our blessed Saviour to be the Lord of that glorious Paradise, and

that he has power over life and death, heaven and hell, salvation and condemnation.

II. Let us now consider the second gift, which Christ bestowed while he hung on the cross; and this was a faithful Son to his disconsolate mother, to be her guardian and protector. The blessed Jesus, now languishing at the point of death, and in the most exquisite pain, is not unmindful of his mother; but expresses a tender concern for her: for as he had loved his 'own who were in the world, he loved them unto the end,' (John xiii. 1.)

Our blessed Lord's affectionate mother had attended him to the place of execution, and there stood as near the cross to which her beloved Son was fastened as the croud would permit her. Then certainly was old Simeon's prophecy concerning her fulfilled, 'Yea a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,' (Luke ii. 35.) For every opprobrious, deriding, and abusive word that was thrown out against her innocent Son, penetrated her maternal heart like a keen arrow. But God, in a very singular manner supported the blessed Virgin in these melancholy circumstances; for we do not read that she made any lamentations, tore her hair, wrung her hands, or that she fainted away. On the contrary, she possed her soul in faith and patience; for she had probably been, many years before, inured to the mystery of the cross, and both from the prophetic writings, and her Son's own information, had learned that his sufferings should have a glorious issue.

But with Mary the mother of our Lord stood two other devote women, namely, her sister who was married to a man called Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene, out of whom the Lord Jesus had cast seven devils (Luke viii. 2.) for which extraordinary favour she, on her side, shewed her gratitude to her deliverer, so as not to forsake him even at the cross. These feeble attendants, by thus approaching near the cross, shamed our Saviour's disciples; none of whom now dared

to shew their heads, St. John alone excepted. These devout women made good the saying of Solomon, namely, 'that love is strong as death,' (Cant. viii. 6.) For it is the nature of true love not to fear any danger, or to be separated from its beloved object by any distress.

Now the blessed Jesus, looking down from the cross, saw his disconsolate mother, and St. John, the disciple whom he particularly loved, standing by her.

Hereupon our blessed Lord said unto her, 'Woman behold thy son;' and thus gave his childless parent another son, who was to cherish, protect, and take care of her in her old age, and to be as a faithful guardian and sincere friend to her on all occasions. It is very probable that our blessed Lord perceived, that his mother's anxious heart was agitated with these or the like thoughts: Alas! what will become of me in the world, now my beloved Son is taken from me? who will protect such a poor, disconsolate, weak woman as I am? Jesus therefore calls out to her in the tenderest accents, There is my best beloved disciple! he will be instead of a son to you. He will take care of you, be a comfortable support to you, and will shew you all the tenderness and affection of a dutiful son.

III. Immediately after this follows the third gift, conferred by our blessed Lord while he hung on the cross. He now turns his benign countenance to his beloved disciple, and addresses him in these words: 'Behold thy mother!' By this speech, Jesus not only enjoins his disciple for the future to behave to Mary as if she was his own mother, and to perform all those duties, which an affectionate parent can expect from an obedient son; but he likewise commits to St. John a most precious jewel, the 'blessed among women,' who had found such favour with God as to bring forth the Seed of the woman. Thus our blessed Saviour, as it were in his last will, leaves to his favourite disciple what was dearest to him of any

thing in this world. The disciple was very far from looking on this as a chargeable incumbrance, but accounted it a singular honour, and immediately secured this valuable legacy. For we read, that 'From that hour the disciple *took* her to his own home;' where he supplied every thing necessary for her support during the remainder of her life. She lived with this disciple, according to some commentators; till the six-third year of her age. St. John was the more ex,editious to receive this precious deposit committed to him, being persuaded that his care of the *mother* of the blessed Jesus would entitle him to call the Lord Jesus his brother, in a stricter sense than other believers.

By these words Christ has confirmed the fifth commandment, and set to all children a pattern of the tender care and affection, which they ought to shew for their parents; and that this care should extend to their last moments, not only in acts of kindness and filial duty, but also by making provision for them if they survive their children. Hence we shall now deduce the following inferences:

1. No real detriment will happen to any Christian by partaking of the reproach of Christ.

How richly are the blessed Virgin and St. John rewarded for the fidelity, which they shewed to the blessed Jesus by attending him in his last moments. Nor was the attendance of the other devout women disregarded by our blessed Lord; for they had afterwards the honour of being the first witnesses and promulgators of his resurrection, (Mark xvi. 1——9.) Thus the blessed Jesus leaves none of those, who are not ashamed of the fellowship of his sufferings, without their reward. Infidelity would indeed persuade men, that they incur great damages by such a fellowship; that it is a great detriment to their temporal callings, &c. But these are all groundless and fallacious suggestions, which may be confuted by numberless instances. Now supposing that all human

aid should forsake us; supposing persecution and distress should attend us; yet we may depend on his friendship, who is the Lord of heaven and earth, who keeps the keys of Paradise and the mansions of bliss; and is ever fulfilling what he has promised in these words; 'Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred fold now in this time, houses and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come, eternal life,' (Mark x. 29, 30.) Therefore let us courageously enlist among the followers of our crucified Saviour; for none of us will repent of having so done, through all the days of eternity.

2. Our blessed Lord has shewn it to be his express will, that they, who believe in his name, should be inseparably joined in the bands of love and unity. We are not to confine these words of Christ, as if they related only to his mother and beloved disciple: for in this his last testament, the Lord Jesus has enjoined, that every believer should do to another all the kind offices he can, and that Christians should shew all possible love, friendship, and benevolence to each other. As he has loved us and given himself up to death for us, he confirms the new commandment, that we should love one another, and by this testamentary injunction, makes this command irrevocable. How then can it be known that we are the disciples of Christ, unless we love one another, and bear each others burdens? this is a duty, which we more particularly owe to the necessitous and the destitute, to strangers, widows, and orphans; and especially, to the poor members of the sacred body of the Lord Jesus. Though the mother of our blessed Lord has been long since dead; yet many pious Christians still remain, of whom Jesus hath said, 'whosoever shall do the will of my father who is in heaven, the

same is my brother, and sister, and mother,' (Matt. xii. 50.) Therefore, when we take such persons in their destitute and comfortless circumstances under our care, the sympathizing Jesus accepts of our kindness, not only as if it were done to his parent; but as a favour bestowed on himself, and will reward it accordingly. Let us therefore, express our love to our crucified Saviour by carefully observing this his last precept, and endeavour to alleviate and sweeten this troublesome life to our afflicted brethren, by our labour of love, and practise all manner of reciprocal kind offices.

3. A cheerful and ready obedience to the commands of our Saviour is the surest mark of the disciple whom Jesus loveth.

St. John, in the instance before us, shews himself to be the disciple whom Jesus loved, by immediately fulfilling his Master's last command with such a ready willingness. For we do not read that he excused himself, and pleaded his own poverty; or that he represented the several avocations of his Apostolic office, &c. But, from that hour, instantly, he took the virgin mother to his own home. If therefore we would be the disciples of Christ, and such disciples as he loveth, and in whom his soul is well pleased; we must do his will from the heart, and execute his commands with a ready obedience; we must set aside the excuses of the flesh, and the evasions of unbelief; and must rejoice at an opportunity of shewing our love to our blessed Saviour, and those who belong to his household.

4. Filial love, besides a cordial affection for parents, ought to shew itself in all obedience and fidelity. Thus in spiritual things, it must appear by praying for, and caring for the welfare of their souls; and, as children cannot requite the benefits they have received from their parents, by supplicating God that he would reward them. Likewise it should appear in temporal things, by promoting their parents advantage as far

as possible; by preventing any damage befalling them in vindicating their good name, assisting them in sickness, poverty, and decrepid age, &c. The honour due to parents consists in the sentiments of the heart, which should be filled with a sincere reverence for them, and shew itself by respectful words and behaviour, and a ready obedience without murmurs, delay, or contradiction; by complying with their lawful commands, and submitting to their reproofs and corrections; by conforming to their advice, patiently bearing their foibles, and throwing a veil over their faults. Such should be the temper and behaviour of all Christian children towards their parents.

5. Our blessed Saviour by his behaviour in his last moments, intended to set a good example in several particulars to dying persons. He teaches them,

First, That they should not behave frowardly and impatiently, under the pains they feel, to those who attend them in their sickness.

Secondly, That they should administer comfort to their afflicted parents, relations, children, &c. who lament their approaching departure, by kind and soothing expressions.

Thirdly, That they should edify them by their example, patience, piety, and devotion, under their sufferings.

Fourthly, That they should settle their worldly concerns with a resigned composure of mind.

Fifthly, That they are not to put off the settling of their temporal affairs to the last moment; but ought to reserve some remainder of time to bestow more immediately on the future welfare of their souls.

Sixthly, That on their death-bed they should do acts of charity, and remember poor widows and orphans, by bestowing something upon them, in order to shew the sincerity of their faith and love.

Seventhly, That they should endeavour, by cordial exhortations on their death-bed, to kindle up in

their families the flame of brotherly love and affection, and more closely unite their relations in the bond of perfection and peace. The observance of these duties will make us resemble the benevolent Jesus in our last moments.

THE PRAYER.

O FAITHFUL and ever-living Saviour! we thank thee who didst confer such excellent and invaluable gifts on the cross, by which thou hast manifested to all the world, not only thy love, but likewise thy riches and power. Thou now livest in strength, and art completely entered on thy government over heaven and earth. Thou hast now the keys of hell and death, of heaven and of paradise: Eternal life and every good gift are in thy hands. Draw us, we beseech thee, so powerfully to thee, that we may be also partakers of thy manifold gifts. Thy unperishable riches are so far from being exhausted, during these eighteen hundred years that have elapsed since thy crucifixion, that thou hast yet in store gifts sufficient for men, even for backsliders; and there are still mansions enough in thy Father's house, into which thou wilt admit those who art not ashamed of thy sufferings, and thy cross. Bless, O Lord, that part of thy word, which has been at present considered, that it may be to all a balsam of life, and may support us to the end, under all the troubles and afflictions which we may meet with in following thee. Grant this for the sake of that love, with which thou hast loved thine own unto the end. Amen. Amen.

CONSIDERATION VIII.

THE LAST SUFFERINGS OF THE LORD JESUS.

'NOW from the sixth hour there was darkness over the land until the ninth hour; and the sun was darken-

ed. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, *Eli, Eli, lamma sabachthani*, that is to say, My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, Behold, this man calleth for Elias. After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: And one run and took a spunge, and filled it with vinegar and put it upon hyssop, or stuck it on a reed, and, held it to his mouth, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let him be; let us see whether Elias will come to save him, and take him down. Now when Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished. And he again cried with a loud voice, and said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit! And having said this, he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.' (Matt. xxvii. 45—50. Mark xv. 33—37. Luke xxiii. 44—46. John xix. 28—30.)

In this part of the Evangelical history of the Passion, we have an account both of the last words, and last sufferings of the Lord Jesus. The last words of Christ on the cross have been illustrated on another occasion. (See "Considerations on the seven Last Words of the crucified Jesus.") To which, for brevity's sake, I refer the reader; and now direct our attention chiefly to the last sufferings of the Lord, yet so as not to omit entirely his last words. Five particulars are specified in the words which we have cited above, namely,

First, The darkness and desertion which oppressed his spotless soul.

Secondly, The mockery of the spectators, when he broke out into those remarkable words, which this agony of his soul extorted from him.

Thirdly, This painful thirst he endured on the cross.

Fourthly, The giving him vinegar to drink by way of derision. And,

Fifthly, The separation of his soul and body by death. These last sufferings of the blessed Jesus we shall treat of in such a method, as to shew how a devout Christian should meditate on them, and elevate his soul to his Saviour in pious ejaculations.

I. The first among these various sufferings of our blessed Lord was the darkness and desertion which oppressed his spotless soul. The dreadful judgments, which God now poured forth on our blessed Saviour, were visibly attended with a total eclipse of the sun. Concerning this remarkable phenomenon, and the desertion of his soul, it is said in the words of the text, 'Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour; and the sun was darkened. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?'

When a pious Christian here observes the exact account, which the Holy Spirit has caused to be taken of the hour of this extreme inward sufferings of Christ, he perceives with a holy reverence, how the particular providence of God over-ruled every circumstance of the sufferings of his Son. For the Evangelists observe, that this darkness lasted from the sixth to the ninth hour; or, according to our computation of time, it began about twelve at noon with an eclipse of the sun, and drew towards a period about three of the clock in the afternoon. The hours are not so punctually set down in the account of any of the transactions of our Saviour's life, as they are in the history of his sufferings. It might seem as if Jesus had been entirely given up to the will of his enemies; but the case was quite otherwise: The providence of God had prescribed limits to their rage; so that they neither could lay hold of him before his hour was come, nor torment him longer than had been pre-determined by God's eternal decree. The same Providence had likewise set certain bounds to the prince of darkness, and confined to a limited time the duration of

his rage and fury against the blessed Seed of the woman.

O my God, may an afflicted soul here say, my sufferings are not at all to be compared for merit to those of my Saviour; yet I know, that even the hours of my sufferings are limited by thy Providence, and that thou countest them out unto me. Thou appointest the beginning and end of my sufferings. Thou frequently orderest, that at noon day my soul shall be involved in darkness; and that it shall sometimes lose the comfortable assurance of thy love, at a time when it shone brightest, and when my soul was full of light, and joyed for thy salvation. Preserve me, O my Father, from ever finding fault with thy computation of the hours; but that I may rather acquiesce with my whole heart in what thou art pleased to inflict upon me. I know that thou orderest every thing for the good of thy creatures. Thou wilt not only count the hours of my sorrows and sufferings; but wilt graciously shorten them, and never suffer me to be tempted above what I am able to bear. Preserve me, O Lord, from the gloom of unbelief, from the darkness of spiritual blindness, and from the eternal night of the dark abyss. Grant that I may walk and work in the light while it is day, before the night comes on, when no man can work.

But justly is the soul astonished at seeing the Son of God, the effulgence of eternal glory, and the source of all light in the kingdoms of nature and grace, hang three tedious hours on the cross amidst the horrors of darkness. What can this mean, that the natural sun loses its brightness, and all the land, or rather the whole earth (Rom. ix. 17. x. 18.) in every part where it should then be day, is involved in thick darkness? The vast body of the sun, which imparts light not only to the earth, but also to the moon and other planets, is totally obscured! This was no usual or common eclipse of the sun, which falls out when the moon is in a direct line between the sun and our earth;

and even then, the sun does not properly lose its radiancy, but its beams are intercepted by the intervening moon from falling on the earth, and consequently illuminating it. Such natural eclipses can never happen at the full of the moon, as it was at that time, nor last above an hour and an half; whereas, this darkness happened at the full of the moon, and lasted three whole hours. In this instance likewise the rays of the sun were not intercepted by the moon; but, as St. Luke expressly says, the sun itself was darkened. When a pious Christian enquires into the signification of this extraordinary phenomenon which happened during our Saviour's passion, he will find, that

1. With regard to the Jewish people, this total darkness denoted, that by crucifying the Messiah they committed such a horrid work of darkness, that the sun would not behold it, nor lend its beams to the perpetration of such an atrocious deed; consequently that God was in the highest manner provoked against the murderers of his Son, and would manifest his wrath from heaven on this wicked and perverse generation; that he would withdraw from them the light of his knowledge and grace, together with all true joy and comfort, and thrust them into the extreme darkness of blindness and obduracy. He may further conclude, that these words of Isaiah were to be fulfilled in the Jewish nation: 'If one look unto the land, behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heaven thereof. And they shall look unto the earth, and behold trouble, darkness, and dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness,' (Isaiah v. 50. viii. 22.) To this also the prophet Amos possibly alludes when he joins the going down of the sun at noon, and darkening the earth in the clear day, with the famine of the word of the Lord sent upon the land, (chap. viii. 9, 11.) Thus, this extraordinary darkness of the sun was a dismal presage of the spiritual darkness of that wretched nation

to this very hour, which the Lord Jesus had predicted by saying unto them, 'Walk while ye have light, lest darkness come upon you,' (John xii. 35.)

2. With regard to our blessed Lord himself, this outward darkness was an emblem of the inward darkness, in which his sacred soul was then involved. For as the light of the natural sun was then withdrawn from the inhabitants of the earth; so the light of the Divine consolation and inward joy was at that time withdrawn from the soul of Jesus Christ: and as cold and darkness then prevailed throughout the whole region of the air, so the soul of our blessed Saviour was to experience something of the terrors of eternal darkness; which now overwhelmed his conscience, from a sense of the imputation of all the sins of the whole world, and threw it into the utmost anguish and consternation. This supernatural darkness was an extraordinary work of the Divine power, and served to shew that Christ was, during that interval, as it were, forsaken by God; so that the visible heaven, the outward court of God's glorious mansion, was deprived of its luminaries during this catastrophe, and no creature enjoyed the enlivening influence of the sun.

O my Saviour, a pious Christian may say, thus was it represented in thy glorious person, what a dark partition sin has made between God and mankind; how it obscured the light of God's benign countenance, and at last would have cast the benighted soul into outward darkness. It was I who deserved to be shut up in this dark prison, who had forsaken the Father of lights; and had loved darkness rather than light. But thou didst appear in my stead, O thou bright effulgence of everlasting light! and didst permit the terrors of eternal night to environ thee, and the power of darkness to assault thee; that thou mightest overcome them, and thereby open to me an access to light and glory, and acquire for me a right to the inheritance of the saints in light. O give me

an irreconcilable hatred against the unfruitful works of darkness, that I may never have any fellowship with them, but rather reprove them. Grant that I may walk in the light, as a child of light, that I may have fellowship with God, who is the source of light. But if, by my open profession of Christianity, I should be deserted by many, and be surrounded with obscurity and a disconsolate gloom; if the light of thy grace should hide itself from the soul; if the hope of my adoption, and of the remission of my sins should be extinguished, so that I must cry out with the Psalmist, 'Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, and in the deeps,' (Psalm lxxxviii. 6.) grant, that according to thy example, I may, in silent patience, wait for the dawn of thy light.

When a pious soul farther employs its thoughts on our Saviour's address to his Father about the ninth hour, towards the period both of the outward and inward darkness, when he cried out, 'My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?' it stands amazed at the filial disposition of the Lord Jesus; who, notwithstanding the agonies that surrounded him, as it were embraces his Father with cordial love, and with a loud cry, which appears to have been accompanied with a flood of tears, (Heb. v. 7.) twice calls to him, My God! my God! As if he had said, "Thou art still my Almighty God, who canst deliver my human nature from this extreme anguish. However severely thou dealest with me; though thou hidest thy face from me; yet will I never turn my looks from thee. The eternal covenant for the redemption of mankind, made between thyself and me, still remains fixed and unmoveable; and though all the floods of the river of Belial beat against me, my confidence in thee shall never be shaken." Moreover, our blessed Saviour asked the cause of this desertion, by saying to his Father, 'Why hast thou forsaken me?' But this was done for our sake, in order to awaken us to reflection. God never forsakes any, but those who have first

forsaken him, (2 Cor. xii. 5.) Now the blessed Jesus had never forsaken his heavenly Father: but, on the contrary, had always done those things that pleased him, (John viii. 29.) Consequently the cause of this desertion is to be sought, not in him, but in us. Alas! we indeed have forsaken our Creator, we had forfeited his precious favour, his inestimable affection; and parted with it as a thing of no worth, in order to satisfy a base passion. God may daily complain of us, 'they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters.' For we may daily observe multitudes, who, for worthless trifles, for a little money, some fleeting sensual gratification, some empty honour, forsake the fountain of all blessings, and transfer their love and confidence to the creatures. Now for the expiation of such a heinous sin, for the reparation of the honour which the Divine Majesty is thereby robbed of; the only begotten Son of the Father here laments, that he is forsaken of God; and this not in mere idea, but in reality. For as Christ had taken our sins upon him, and become a curse for us; so was he forsaken by God not only outwardly, by withdrawing his protection from him and giving him up to his enemies, (Psalm iii. 2.) but likewise inwardly; the Deity suspending his blissful operations on his understanding, will, conscience, and defections, and permitting all the power of the devil, and the agonies of death, jointly to assault him. As, in quality of our surety, he was to feel our pains, to bear our griefs, and carry our sorrows, (Isaiah liii. 4.) so was his soul to be deprived, for a while, of the brightness of God's countenance, and the enjoyment of the supreme good, by which the inward sensation of the pain would have been very much abated, if not totally extinguished. On the other hand, he was to suffer all the floods of the Divine wrath to pass over him; which would have overwhelmed our Saviour's human nature, had not the Divinity within him supported it in this terrible trial. Thus, under this

grievous depression of body and soul, God remained the strength and portion of his heart, (Psalm lxxiii. 26.) so that in this extreme mental agony, he adhered to the Almighty God with undismayed confidence, wrestled with him all the time of this darkness, and did not leave him till he had obtained for us the assurance of a blessing. As our blessed Saviour produced the merit of his innocence, and his perfect filial obedience, to fill up the horrid gulf that was between God and man; he has thereby opened to us a way to gain the friendship of God, reconciled heaven and earth, and again acquired for us a right to a fellowship with God, which we had unhappily forfeited.

O my Saviour! I am astonished to see in this mirror of wrath, the effects and consequences of sin. Forgive me, who have drawn upon thee such a terrible privation of all comfort, such a dreadful feeling of the Divine wrath! May I hence learn, how terrible a thing sin is in the sight of God, and what a dreadful separation it has made between God and man. Grant that I may highly value that fellowship with God, to which thou hast obtained for me a right; and that I may highly value and rejoice in that comfortable promise of thy Father, who hath said, 'I will not leave thee, nor forsake thee.' Stand by me, O blessed Redeemer, in the hour of desertion! That gloomy path thou hast sanctified, by patiently bearing to be deserted by every comfort, and hast changed into a way of benediction. Now, thou knowest what it is to be thus deserted, and, as a merciful High Priest, canst have compassion on those who are in such a state. Nay, thou wast deserted for that very purpose, that I might not be eternally forsaken. If, with distressed Sion, I must some time cry out, 'The Lord hath forsaken and forgotten me,' (Isaiah xlix, 14.) yet assure thyself, O my soul, that thou shalt no longer be called the forsaken and hated, (Isaiah lx. 15.) but that, with St. Paul, thou wilt be able to say, 'I am persecuted, but not forsaken,' (2 Cor. iv. 9.) In such

circumstances, may thy meritorious sufferings benefit me. May thy affectionate exclamation, My God, my God, be of a strong preservative against despondency; so that my heart, even in darkness, may wait the dawn of thy heavenly light. And as, for my sake, thou hast descended so low, and wast plunged so deep in misery that thy soul was forsaken, and stripped of all consolatory influences; make me willing to be deprived of every thing for thy sake, that I may be found in thee. With these and the like good thoughts, a faithful Christian considers this last part of our Saviour's sufferings.

II. We come, in the next place, to consider the mockery of the spectators, at the words which the extreme anguish of the blessed Jesus extorted from him. 'Some of them who stood there, said, He calleth for Elias.' Here one may be justly astonished at the power of darkness, which displays itself in this deriding speech. These scoffers must certainly have been Jews; since the heathens knew nothing of Elias. But the Jews, at that time, had a great many false notions concerning that prophet; for they imagined that before the coming of the Messiah, he would be sent from heaven, whither he had been taken up alive; and that he would come again upon the earth, and perform several remarkable actions. Now when they heard the crucified Jesus crying out in such plaintive accents, *Eli, Eli*, though they well knew that in these words of the Psalmist, (Psalm xxii. 1.) he addressed himself to the mighty God of heaven, they immediately perverted his words, and of Eli, made Elias. Thus they scoffingly charge him with imploring the assistance of that prophet, so eminent for his miracles; nay they pretend, that in his distress he departed from the living God, and placed his confidence in the creature. Consequently they insinuate, that he died as an idolator, and therefore went down to the grave with the curse of God upon him; it being said by the prophet, 'Cursed be the man that trusteth in man,

and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord,' (Jer. xvii. 5.)

Alas! there must be in the human heart an unfathomable abyss of wickedness. These impious scoffers were, for three hours successively, shackled with the bands of darkness; and had seen and felt the Divine displeasure in the extraordinary miracle, whereby the light of the sun was extinguished: Yet, no sooner did the light begin to return; scarce were they recovered from their fear and consternation, but they renew their former insolence, and make a mock of our blessed Saviour's doleful cries. I tremble to think that the seed of such impiety lurks in the human heart. I see many who have no sooner risen from the bed of death, and are scarce recovered from a dangerous fit of sickness, or narrowly escaped with their lives from some imminent danger, but they immediately return to their drunkenness, voluptuousness, and sensuality; to their pride, deceit, lying, mocking, and profane jesting. Be merciful, O my Saviour, to such unhappy men, concerning whom thou canst not but complain, 'I chastise them, but they feel it not;' and grant that thy judgments, whether seen, heard, or felt, may make a deep and lasting impression on my soul!

But O my Redeemer, if I should be treated as thou wast on the cross; if insolent men should mock and deride me, and pervert the words of the mournful lamentations which grief and pain may extort from me; grant that I may think on thy patience and resignation under such sufferings. Ever preserve me from the impiety of adding to the pains of the afflicted, by mockery and derision; on the contrary, give me a tender and compassionate heart, that I may weep with those that weep, and sympathise with the distresses of others.

III. In the third place, we are to consider the painful thirst which our blessed Lord endured. How must the arrows of the Almighty have, as it were,

drank up our Saviour's blood, when he thus complained of thirst! How must his soul have laboured, during the three hours of darkness, and his body, already exhausted by the loss of so much blood, have been totally deprived of its strength, so that his tongue claved to the roof of his mouth!

Thanks be to thee, O blessed Jesus, who wast so earnest in the work of my redemption, as to forget to eat or drink; labouring in that arduous task, till thou wast quite spent, and all thy vital juices were in a manner exhausted. By this thy painful thirst, thou hast atoned for my relinquishing the fountain of living waters, and delivered me from eternal thirst and want. Thou hast by thy suffering opened a way for penitent sinners into paradise, to the water of life which issues from the throne of God, and to the rivers of heavenly pleasures.

But here a pious soul may say, could my Saviour, who was now taken up in accomplishing the arduous work of my redemption, feel any other thirst besides that of his body? Yes certainly, his soul, like a hunted stag, thirsted after the springs of God's comforts. It passionately longed to see his enlivening countenance, which now, for a while, had been as it were hid from him. Nay, his benevolent soul also thirsted after my soul, and its eternal salvation. Hast thou, O my Redeemer, thus desired my happiness? How desirous should I be, in return, of thy grace! Therefore, as the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God, (Psalm xlii. 1.) Kindle in me an ardent thirst after thy righteousness; and, on the other hand, quench and deaden in me all thirst after the pleasures of the world, after its honours and riches. For amidst all these, one is like a thirsty man, who dreameth, and, as the prophet says, 'behold he drinketh; but he awaketh, and behold he is faint,' (Isaiah xxix. 8.) Give me to drink of the water which thou freely givest to the thirsty; and at last, O my Saviour, lead me to those

fountains of living waters, where thy saints shall thirst no more, (Rev. vii. 16, 17.)

Lastly, When a pious Christian farther considers, that the Lord Jesus publicly made known his thirst that the Scripture might be fulfilled; it being expressly said by the Evangelist, that he cried out, 'I thirst;' he admires the reverence which the eternal word of God expressed for the written Word of God. Jesus well knew, that this declaration of his thirst would draw on him a fresh insult; yet he was far from declining any additional suffering, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, and that the truth of it might be confirmed by a new seal. O preserve me from undervaluing the Word of the living God, or contemptuously using it as a dead letter! Grant that I may rather honour it as the voice of the Supreme Majesty of heaven, and choose it for the rule of my faith and practice; and that I may be willing to suffer any thing, that the Scripture may be fulfilled in me. 'For they that will live Godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution,' (2 Tim. iii. 12.)

IV. We come, in the fourth place, to consider the insult offered to our blessed Lord, by giving him vinegar to drink. For when the soldiers heard the languishing Jesus complain of thirst, they filled a spunge with vinegar [which was in a vessel at hand, as it was at that age the common drink for soldiers,] and put it on a reed, or, according to St. John, a stalk cut from a large hyssop shrub, and held it up to his dry and parched lips by way of derision, instead of a cordial to support his drooping spirits.

Here a devout soul is amazed, on the one hand, at the obduracy and barbarity of the human heart, and that these wicked men should be so utterly void of humanity and compassion; and, on the other hand, at the greatness of our Saviour's love to mankind, who endured all this for our sake. Our blessed Saviour, by this circumstance of his passion, also fulfilled the Scripture, which he himself inspired;

where he appoints this kind of suffering for himself, and says by the mouth of the Psalmist, 'In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink,' (Psalm lxix. 21.) He likewise confirmed his own words to his disciples: 'I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine,' (Matt. xxvi. 29.) O dearest Redeemer, thanks be to thee for thine inconceivable love! Every thing which was transacted on the cross, was done for my good. It was out of love to me, that thou wast thirsty; it was out of love to my soul, that thou didst drink. Grant, that when thou thirsteth in thy poor members, I may relieve and comfort them, not with vinegar, but to the best of my power. But if the world should give me a disagreeable sour potion in my distress, may it be sweetened by the memory of thy love and patience!

But the astonishment of a pious Christian will yet encrease, when he calls to mind that the Jews, who stood about the cross, still mocked thee, our dear Redeemer! For while the soldier was pressing the spunge filled with vinegar to his sacred mouth, they called out in a deriding manner, 'Let him be; let us see whether Elias will come to save him!' According to St. Mark's account, the inhuman soldier likewise joined in the mockery. In these words the spirit of reviling had inserted his venomous sting; for by this the Jews intimated, that the Lord Jesus was a false Messiah; who, since no body acknowledged him on the cross, expressed a desire that Elias would come and perform a miracle, by taking him down from the cross, and by that means declare and constitute him the Messiah. O my Saviour! must then all the waves and storms of affliction, with combined impetuosity, pass over thee in the last moments of thy life? Has it cost thee so dear to open the consolatory spring of life to me, a wretched worm, that my fainting soul may be refreshed with goodness and mercy? Eternal thanks be to thee for such transcendent love! Grant that I may readily determine to bear the most disagree-

able sensations, in following thee; and not think it strange that the world should embitter any cordial it offers me, and, under the show of a kind office, should grieve my soul with mockeries and insults. O preserve me in the hour of suffering, and grant that I may not turn my confidence from God to the creatures! Though the world slander and revile me, I will wrap myself in silence, and refer the manifestation of my innocence to thee.

V. Lastly, All these sufferings of our Saviour were succeeded by the separation of his soul and body, by a blessed, but torturing death. After Jesus had received the vinegar, nothing further remained to be transacted or suffered on the cross. He had now drunk off the cup of sufferings; the law was fulfilled; sin was sealed up, the guilt of it atoned for, and the punishment endured.

O the joy of a faithful soul, at hearing his Saviour cry out, 'It is finished!' Ever praised be thy name, O my God, that I have a complete Mediator, 'who, by offering one great sacrifice, hath perfected forever all those that are sanctified,' (Heb. x. 14.) Therefore, O thou ALPHA and OMEGA, I will in faith embrace thee, the great author and finisher of my faith. Thou hast finished whatever appertained to my redemption; this thy meritorious work I will produce at the Divine tribunal, and with it cover the defects of my imperfect obedience. Grant, O my Saviour, that the work of grace may be also finished in me. Give me not only to will and believe; but likewise to do and accomplish what thou commandest, according to thy good pleasure; and grant that I may keep the faith, and at last obtain the crown of righteousness.

And now our blessed Redeemer prepares himself for death. Here the pious soul wonders at the resignation, which his Saviour displays at the hour of death. The evangelical history informs us, that he again cried with a loud voice, and said, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit; and having said this, he bowed

his head, and gave up the ghost.' Here we may recollect a former saying of the Lord Jesus, namely, 'No man taketh my life from me; but I lay it down of myself,' (John x. 18.) He delivered up his soul as a precious pledge into the hands of his Father, from whom, he knew, he should again receive it on the third day. Thanks be to thee, O Saviour, says the pious soul, for entering so willingly on death. Thanks be to thee, that with thy soul thou hast also recommended my soul into the hands of the Father. O my Saviour, extirpate from my heart all fear of death; and let thy willingness to die also work in me a willing desire to depart, and to be with thee.

But this loud cry, with which our Saviour gave up the ghost, probably proceeded from extreme pain and agony. The death which HE suffered was quite different from that of his followers. Death, when it attacked him, was not divested of its sharp sting, which the Mediator was severely to feel. The pains of death came on him, as the pains of birth on a woman in travail. He was to taste of death in all its bitterness; and by that means, to extract its sting and disarm it, (1 Cor. xv. 55.) so that it might be changed into a tranquil sleep to believers. Thanks be to thee, O my Saviour, who by thy death hast taken away the power of death, and hast divested him of his sting, so that I need no more be afraid of it. May thy last words be my light, when death shall oppress my soul with gloomy horrors! O eternal Word, let thy loud cry speak for me, when my power of speech shall fail; and may I in my death enjoy the fruit of thy victory over death; so that even the last shout of thy host with which thou shalt come to judgment, instead of terror, may be a sound of joy and exultation to me.

THE PRAYER.

LORD Jesus, bless to our souls this Consideration of thy last sufferings; and grant that it may leave on our hearts a holy and lasting impression. May these

hours of study be so profitably spent, that I may feel the benefit of them at my death, and praise thee for them in eternity. Grant this, O Lord, for the sake of thy death and passion. Amen.

CONSIDERATION IX.

THE LAST* HOURS OF THE LORD JESUS.

'IN thee, O Lord, do I put my trust, let me never be ashamed: Deliver me in thy righteousness; bow down thine ear to me, and deliver me speedily: Be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me. For thou art my rock, and my fortress; therefore, for thy name's sake, lead me and guide me. Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: Thou art my strength. Into thine hand I commend my spirit: Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth. I have hated those that regard lying vanities; but I trust in the Lord. I will be glad, and rejoice in thy mercy; for thou hast considered my trouble: Thou hast known my soul in adversities, and hast not shut me up in the hand of the enemy; thou hast set my feet in a large room,' (Psalm xxx. 1—9.)

The fifth verse of this Psalm, namely, 'Into thy hand I commend my spirit,' are to be considered as the key to lead us into the right sense of the text; and from these words an attentive mind may easily infer, that this part of the Psalm treats of our ever glorious Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. For as he appropriates to himself the twenty-second Psalm, by borrowing from it these words which he spoke on the cross, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me;' so has he likewise appropriated to himself this Psalm, by saying, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my Spirit.' Hence we may conclude, that Christ is

* Hours signify devotion.

introduced speaking here; who in the first verse of this Psalm says, 'In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust, let me never be ashamed: Deliver me in thy righteousness, &c.' In these words the suffering Jesus speaks; who, in the last moments of his life, here enters on a new pathetic discourse with his Father, and at length gives up the Ghost, in assurance of a joyful resurrection. In this manner the last moments of the crucified Jesus are here described, which we shall consider as an edifying pattern of the last hours of a dying Christian. In the consideration of this subject, we shall shew,

First, How the Lord Jesus behaved in his last hours.

Secondly, How a dying Christian is to behave in his last hours, and prepare for his approaching death.

I. As to the account of Christ's last hours, as prefigured in this Psalm, it contains,

First, His last supplication.

Secondly, His last ejaculation.

First, In his last prayer, which is comprehended in the first four verses of this Psalm, he calls on God for a happy issue of the work of redemption, and places his confidence in his heavenly Father, saying, 'In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust.'

In these words he reminds his Father, that, hitherto in all the storms with which his human nature had been assaulted, he had made HIM his sole refuge, and firmly trusted that he would deliver him from anguish and death, and at length eminently manifest his glory. And as now in the last moments of his life, even whilst the scoffers are crying out, 'He trusted in God, let him deliver him now, if he will have him,' he persisted unshaken in this confidence; so that his heavenly Father could not but lend a gracious ear to the last prayer, which he was now going to offer up to him. On this follow the dying Redeemer's petitions as contained in this Psalm.

The first petition in this prayer is, 'Let me be never ashamed.' The Son of God, in order to glorify his Father, had delivered himself up to reproach and infamy. He had suffered himself, the night before, to be apprehended as a murderer and a rebel, and to be sentenced to death as a blasphemer. Now, he hangs exposed and naked on an accursed cross, as the vilest of malefactors, and is insulted by all ranks of people. Therefore, he had before said to his Father in another Psalm, (Psalm lxix. 7.) 'For thy sake I have borne reproach: Shame hath covered my face.' But in these words he properly deprecates eternal shame and confusion, and prays, that in this hour of darkness, the Father would not withdraw his hand from him, nor give him up to eternal reproach; but that by death he would put an end to the raging waves of abuse and insults, with which he had hitherto been covered; that he would glorify him again after all this mockery and reproach; and that he would bring him forth again with honour from the grave, and so manifest his innocence, that they, who should believe in him might not be confounded in their hope; which would inevitably be the case, if he, the Captain of their salvation, should continue in the grave, and be overcome by death. Thus he also prays in the sixty-ninth Psalm: (verse 6.) 'Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord God of Hosts, be ashamed for my sake; let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel.'

The second petition in this prayer is: 'Deliver me, [namely, from everlasting reproach and the bands of death] in thy righteousness.'

Our Mediator, by his manifold sufferings, which were soon to terminate in death, had appeased the Divine justice, and made satisfaction to it for the sins of mankind. Therefore he might, with comfort, now appeal to God's righteousness or justice; and require, that it would deliver him from reproach, justify him by the resurrection; and, as it were, give

him his discharge for the ransom he had paid, by declaring him for ever free from all farther claims and demands. Hence he says, 'Deliver me in thy righteousness,' or as it is in another Psalm, (Psalm xxxv. 24.) 'Judge me, O Lord my God, according to thy righteousness.'

The third petition in the text is, 'Bow down thy ear to me.' Hitherto God, as a just Judge, had as it were turned aside his ear from our Saviour, without attending to his doleful lamentation: Hence he complains in another Psalm, (Psalm xxii. 2, 3.) 'O my God, I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.' But now, he prays, that before the period of his life, his Father would favour him with one gracious look; and fully assure him that the prayer, which the great High Priest offered up for himself and all who should believe in his name, with strong crying and tears, might be heard. Being at this instant descended to the lowest degree of abasement, he prays that the Father would incline down his ear to him; and, as the close of his life drew near, he intreats him that he would 'deliver him speedily,' as it is in the text.

The fourth petition in the text is, 'Be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence, [a fortified, impregnable place] to save me.' Our Redeemer, in his sufferings, was given up by his Father to his inveterate enemies. All the powers of darkness discharged their fury on his soul; and many scurrilous tongues with combined malice cried out, while he was hanging on the cross, 'He saved others, himself he cannot save.' The soldiers called out, 'If thou be the King of the Jews, save thyself.' Even one of the crucified malefactors joined in the cry, and said, 'If thou be Christ or the Messiah, save thyself and us.' His confidence in God's assistance being thus assaulted, he prays, 'Save me,' that the slanders

of mine enemies, who say that my soul is to expect no help from thee, may be confuted by real fact. And as our Saviour was now destitute of all human and angelic protection, and exposed naked and defenceless to all the assaults of his enemies, he prays that his heavenly Father would be his rock and fortress; that he would raise him up, bring him into safety, and deliver him from all future assaults of death and hell. But to avoid any appearance of complaint against his Father, as if he had been wanting to shew himself his rock and fortress, he subjoins, 'For thou art my rock and my fortress,' and hast hitherto constantly shewed thyself such: Be pleased farther to continue my strong rock unto the end of my life, which now approaches. With this we may compare the Messiah's effusions of gratitude, as they are expressed in another Psalm (Psalm xviii. 1, 2.) 'I will love thee, O Lord, my strength! The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer: My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.'

The fifth petition of this prayer is, 'For thy name's sake, lead me and guide me.' He now drew near to the end of his toilsome journey, when a sudden darkness and night came upon him. Not only the natural Sun withheld its light at the Divine command, so that horrid darkness obscured the whole country for three hours; but the light of comfort and joy was, as it were, eclipsed in his oppressed soul; and now he was immediately to enter into the gloomy valley of the shadow of death. He therefore supplicates his Father, that he would guide him, as the shepherd does his sheep, and conduct him to the happy end of his tedious, painful journey. This he requests of God for his name's sake; in the glorifying of which he had hitherto been occupied in the work of reconciliation, and whose honour was inseparably interwoven with the happy issue of this arduous work. Hence he says (John xvii. 4, 5, 6.) 'I have glorified thee on earth; I

have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. I have manifested thy name unto men; and now, O Father, glorify thou me!'

Lastly, The sixth petition in the text runs thus: 'Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: Thou art my strength.' The sufferings of the Messiah are frequently compared in the Psalms to a chased deer, and his enemies to furious hunters, who, by their lies and slanders, had spread their net to catch him, and pleased themselves with this conclusion, viz. When once he is hunted down he will never rise again. Hence the Messiah is represented complaining, 'Without cause they have hid for me their net in a pit which, without cause, they have digged for my soul', (Psalm xxxv. 7.) Now this net was that horrible accusation alleged by the Jews, That he had blasphemed God. This net, his judges as it were combined to throw over him, by sentencing him to die as a blasphemer, in these words: 'He is worthy of death.' Therefore, he now intreats his Father to pluck him out of the net, *i. e.* to manifest to all the world, that he is now no blasphemer; but that he had always honoured his Father, and dedicated his whole life to his glory; and that all the crimes, for which he was indicted in the spiritual and temporal courts of the Jews and Gentiles, were mere falsities and calumnies. To this petition he adds his motive for trusting in, and praying to, his Father: 'For thou art my strength;' thou hast strength and power to tear this net in pieces and deliver me out of it.

These are the six important petitions which, it may be supposed, the dying Messiah sent up to his Father in the last moments of his life. But here he does not at all pray to be excused from death; but that the Father would so direct the circumstances of it, that his innocence may be manifested, and his Father's name glorified.

Secondly, To these last petitions now succeeded the last ejaculation or recommendatory prayer, with

which our blessed Saviour concluded his life on the cross. It contains,

1. A calm resignation of his soul into his Father's hands.

2. A joyful confidence and assurance of his subsequent exaltation.

1. The calm resignation of his soul into his Father's hands is expressed in these words: 'Into thy hands I commend my spirit.' Our blessed Lord had the power of laying down his life, or soul, (1 John x. 18.) But he knew of no better and safer place to deposit it than in the hands of his dear Father, *i. e.* under his gracious and Almighty protection, who has a tender care for all his children, and particularly for his only begotten Son. To the care and protection of his Father he recommends his harrassed spirit, which hitherto had laboured and conflicted for the salvation of mankind. This is a jewel of inestimable worth, he deposits in the hands of God, in the certain hope of receiving it again on the third day, and re-uniting it with his glorified body.

But our dying Saviour, according to the text in the Psalm, subjoins the motives, which induces him to deliver up his soul into the faithful hands of his Father; and these are derived partly from God, and partly from our Redeemer himself.

The motive, on God's side, was his faithfulness, which Jesus had so richly experienced during his whole life. Hence he says, 'Thou hast redeemed me,' [from all distress which ever befel me in my whole life, and hast promised to raise me from death and glorify me.] 'O Lord, thou God of truth!' Thou wilt infallibly fulfil thy promise; for thou hast said, 'When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed; he shall prolong his days; and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he has poured out his soul unto death: And he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors,' (Isaiah liii. 10, 11, 12.)

The motive derived from our Redeemer himself, for giving up his soul into the hands of God, was his good conscience. For he was sensible that in his heart he had never departed from God, never sided with his enemies; but, as a true servant of God, and an obedient Son, had performed the whole will of his heavenly Father. Hence he says in the text, 'I hate them that regard lying vanities; but I trust in the Lord.' This was literally true: For the Lord Jesus, especially in his ministerial office, sufficiently evidenced his abhorrence of the lying vanities, the erroneous doctrines, the false glosses, the traditions, and all the corruption and superstition of the Jewish doctors at that time. Nay, he was so far from countenancing them, that, about four days before his death, (Matt. xxiii.) he had publicly reprimanded and denounced several woes against them for their hypocrisy, &c. On the other hand, he had trusted in the Lord; he had always faithfully espoused his cause, and performed all his will. Hence he could justly say, 'The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him,' (John viii. 29.) Therefore, now in the hour of death, he, without any apprehension or fear, recommends his soul to his paternal care and almighty protection.

2. The joyful confidence and assurance which our Saviour had of his resurrection and exaltation is thus expressed in the text: 'I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy; for thou hast considered my trouble, &c.' From these words we may learn in general, that the soul of Jesus Christ was, after the afflictive interval of darkness and desertion, again irradiated, comforted, gladened, and perfectly assured of his heavenly

Father's love, even before its departure from the body. He therefore rejoices in the goodness and affection of his heavenly Father, of which he adduces the following proofs:

1. 'Thou hast considered my trouble,' namely, with paternal compassion, and readiness to help me.

2. 'Thou hast known my soul in adversities:' Or thou knowest me under the distress and anguish of my soul; and though I hang naked and wounded on the cross as a wretched worm, yet art thou not ashamed of me, but ownest me for thy Son, and already art making preparations to glorify me.

3. 'And hast not shut me up in the hand of the enemy.' And though thou hast given me up into the hands of men, yet thou hast not left me shut up in them, but hast taken me again out of their hands into thine own; and thus, at my death, thou hast neither given up my body to the rage of mine enemies, nor my soul to the prince of darkness.

4. 'Thou hast set my feet in a large room.' Thou hast delivered me from oppression and anguish, and by the resurrection hast placed me in a state of consolation and joy, which is here termed a large room.

In all these proofs of the Divine goodness the soul of Christ as it were rejoices, just before its departure, from an absolute assurance that his heavenly Father would shew himself tender and affectionate to him, even in his death. Hence he says in another Psalm, (Psalm xvi. 9. 10.) 'Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope.' For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

This is the account of our blessed Saviour's last hours, and certainly the worth of it is inestimable. For therein are made known to us the most secret thoughts that passed in the heart of our dying Mediator; of which little mention is made in the Evangelical history of the passion, but they are fully displayed in the passion Psalms. For in these Psalms,

the Holy Ghost, as it were, opens the heart of our IMMANUEL, and gives us a lively representation of the most secret thoughts and motions which passed in it during his sufferings. What a delightful sight! When in this sacred heart, now near breaking, nothing is seen but a filial confidence, and sure trust in his heavenly Father. All his agonies end in a calm resignation; he closes his life with an affectionate recommendation of his soul into his Father's hands, and a joyful assurance of a glorious resurrection. This is not the exit of a malefactor, or blasphemer; this is dying like our true Redeemer, who is able to comfort others with the consolation, wherewith he was comforted in his last hours; who knows by experience what it is to die; who presents to God the petitions of his dying brethren; who can have compassion on the agonies of their minds; who has prepared mansions for them in his Father's house, whither he before sent his own departed spirit; and lastly, who has even acquired for them an assurance, that through death they shall pass into life, and go to his Father, who will deliver them from every pain and every sorrow.

Thus has our blessed Saviour, in the last hours of his life, borne witness of himself; thus has he by his irreproachable behaviour sanctified the last hours of believers; thus has he, by his last prayers, procured a hearing for their last prayers and broken sighs; and, in a word, he has thus acquired for them every thing appertaining to a serene and joyful departure from this world to the heavenly mansions. Therefore, ye who have received grace to believe, imitate your Saviour; make yourselves betimes acquainted with this mighty conqueror of the fears of death, that you, with the like resignation and trust in God, may enter the valley of the shadow of death, and deliver up your souls into your heavenly Father's hands. But as for you who are still so unhappy as to be strangers to the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ, be persuaded

betimes to give yourselves up soul and body to his reasonable service; 'and ye shall find rest in your souls,' (Matt. xi. 29.) behold, how willingly and cheerfully he entered on the most painful death, out of love to your lost souls; that he might acquire for you the Divine mercy, eternal life, and ever-during happiness. Therefore enter into his blessed fellowship; follow him as your leader in his God like life, that, in your last hours, he may likewise be your great example.

II. From the example given us by our blessed Lord, we are now to shew how a dying Christian is to behave in his last hours, and more carefully prepare himself for his approaching death.

Let it be carefully observed, in the first place, that we do not here intend to shew at large, how one whom God has suddenly laid on a death bed in the midst of his sins, and in a state of impenitence, shall prepare himself for death. For such a wretched sinner, the example of the penitent malefactor would be more suitable, than that of our dying Saviour, which we are at present considering. However, we shall briefly consider the case of such an unhappy person.

Such a wretched man standing on the brink of eternity, and having the sentence of death in his conscience; who is just closing his eyes in death, and does not find himself at all prepared to die; whose heart is entirely set upon this world, and yet must immediately leave it, and pass into a world utterly unknown to him; who has drawn God's displeasure on himself by innumerable sins, and is now to stand before his awful tribunal, and hear sentence passed on him: Such a wretched sinner, I say, cannot better employ the last hours of his life, than in endeavouring after a reconciliation with his Creator. In order to this, he is, as far as the violence of his pains, the nature of his distemper, and the dread of death, will permit, to collect all the powers of his mind; to take a retrospect of his whole life, and compare it with the unerring

rule of the word of God; and to add to this fervent prayers that God would be pleased to open his eyes, and, by the light of his grace, to give him a true sight of his unhappy situation.

In thus turning his thoughts on his past life, he will clearly observe these two particulars:

First, That he has done none of those things which he ought to have done, in order to work out his salvation.

Secondly, That he has committed innumerable sins of all kinds in thought, word, and action, against God, his neighbour, and against himself.

On duly considering his former behaviour in this light, it will appear to him to be the greatest madness, and the most brutal stupidity. He will acknowledge, that he has acted contrary to the most common rules and maxims of sound reason, by despising the inexpressible felicity freely offered to him in the gospel; that he had suffered himself to be diverted, by the most wretched and trifling impediments, from the great duty of making his reconciliation with God; that perhaps for the sake of petty worldly advantages, which now must forever cease with death, he has forfeited the real and glorious possessions of a blessed eternity; and that for a momentary sinful lust, he has precipitated himself in an abyss of torment and misery. In his former behaviour he will observe a dreadful injustice, and abominable ingratitude; for he has by numberless crimes offended that God who gave him his being, and who from time to time has showered down innumerable blessings on him; he has set at nought his worship, has not believed his promises, nor feared his menaces; and, instead of making any grateful returns of love to such a gracious, bountiful, and benevolent Being, he has shewed himself a stubborn, abandoned rebel. When his former behaviour appears thus abominable to him, he must further call upon God, intreating him that he would work in him a salutary repentance, and Godly sorrow. This will induce him

to detest his whole former conduct; sincerely to hate and abhor his sins; and to be heartily sorry for his base and unworthy behaviour towards God, whose goodness is infinite, by requiting all his love and accumulated benefits with such unnatural returns of ingratitude.

But the nearer he approaches to the last hour of his life, the more expeditious must he be, amidst the most contrite sentiments of his unworthiness, and of his having deserved the wrath of God, in applying to the infinite mercy of God in Christ Jesus; and for his sake, he must humbly implore the forgiveness of all his sins. He must, like a dying malefactor who is just at the point of execution, confess that he is a wretched sinful worm, that deserves to be trodden under foot, and crushed by the Divine justice; and yet place his confidence on the gracious promise of God, by which he has sworn by himself, that he does not desire the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live. Thus must he persevere, hungering and thirsting after mercy, lamenting and bewailing his sins, and praying for remission of them, till faith proves victorious over the accusations of conscience, and the terrors of hell and death; and till he obtains in his soul some comfortable hopes of the grace of God, and the remission of his sins. Such must be the resource and behaviour of him, whom God summons to die in the midst of his sins.

That a sinner, who thus sincerely and heartily labours towards his conversion in his last hours, may be snatched as a brand out of the fire, is not to be doubted. But alas! how rare are such examples of late and effectual repentance? Many who never experienced any thing of repentance or faith, who made religion their jest during their lives, die with a lethargic and insensible conscience, that does not once disturb them on account of their past wicked lives. They depart hence with blinded eyes and a more than stoical apathy, quite unconcerned, to their eternal per-

dition. After death they are celebrated by mercenary orators as persons that died serenely and piously, in the full enjoyment of their senses and reason, without any delirious symptoms, and in the fulness of faith in Christ. Many fall into the hands of false comforters, who mistake the natural motions of fear and grief, for the work of conversion; and if the agonies of death extort from them a short prayer or a few tears, it is immediately construed as a sign of an effectual repentance, and they are soothed with a false hope of future happiness. But many are so suddenly surprised by death in their security, that they are removed from this world to the next, as it were, in a hurricane, before they are aware of their condition. Therefore, O ye unwise, defer not your repentance to such uncertain precarious moments, as are not in your power! How wise and happy is he, who betimes regulates the concerns of his soul, and sets his house in order! so that when he comes to die, he may have nothing to do but, after the example of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to recommend his soul into the hands of his heavenly Father.

But even when a person, who in the days of health has reconciled himself with his Creator, and been fruitful in the practice of good works, and of faith which worketh by love, is seized with his last illness; he will likewise find it necessary to employ in a Christian preparation for death those remaining hours, which God is pleased to favour him with.

Now what this preparation of a dying Christian consists in cannot be better learned than from the example of our blessed Saviour. In this preparation of a dying believer, a sincere conversion to God is presupposed to have been already done in the time of health, the genuineness of which has appeared by the fruits it has produced. But in case any mistrustful doubts arise in the minds of such persons especially of the weak and scrupulous; they must, before all things, endeavour to remove and clear them up by a

careful examination. It will therefore be proper to take a review of the whole ground of their hope, in order to know whether they have built their house on the sand, or on an immoveable rock. It will be likewise proper to examine, whether ever they had a sincere concern about the favour of God, so that they could willingly forego all the earthly advantages of this life in order to obtain it. It will be proper, farther, to search their own heart, and enquire whether they had a real hatred and abhorrence against every sin, so that they no longer complied with any one sin willingly and deliberately; and, even concerning the common failings and weaknesses which still cleave to the best of us, whether they have often in private humbled themselves before God, and been troubled for nothing so much as a want of fervent love to their God and Saviour, who is so worthy of all our affections. If we find these tokens in us, we may be sufficiently convinced of the genuineness of our repentance, and the change or our heart; though we cannot, as some pretend, tell the day and hour of our conversion.

In this case, it is not necessary to renew the whole conflict of repentance, unless God, from particular motives, leads the soul into it, and brings it before his tribunal; either on account of its natural impurity, or of particular bosom sins, in the mortifying of which it has not shewn proper vigour and resolution; and thus, as it were, by a salutary fire purifies it from much hidden dross and secret sins. Thus it sometimes happens that those persons, who in their life time had the appearance of good Christians, have, on their death-bed, undergone severe conflicts for things which, in the time of life, they looked on as trifles. For, at that important crisis, the accuser of mankind is industrious in bringing forth every thing that may annoy us, and throws many dying persons into dreadful terrors.

But, exclusive of such circumstances, it is sufficient for good Christians if, on their death-bed, they in

general sincerely repent of all the sins of their whole life, humbly acknowledge their secret faults, and seek remission of them in the blood of Christ. They ought also, where it is necessary, so far to shew the fruits of their genuine repentance, (if they are conscious of having given offence, or caused trouble to any one by some inadvertent steps) as to endeavour to make amends for it by a sincere acknowledgment, and asking pardon of the party offended; or if they recollect that any person, without any blame on their side, has lived in enmity with them, to use all possible means for a reconciliation, so that before their departure, their neighbour may thus be turned from the error of his ways.

True conversion to God being pre-supposed before a man is laid on a sick-bed, the preparation of a Christian for his approaching death, according to the example of our Saviour, consists of these four particulars.

First, The exercise of prayer.

Secondly, Of faith.

Thirdly, Of hope, and

Fourthly, Of an entire offering up of the soul to God.

First, In the exercise of prayer. Our blessed Saviour began and finished his last hours on the cross with prayer. His first words were, 'Father, forgive them;' and his last words, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.' Therefore prayer is the chief business of a dying Christian. He will easily find great abundance of matter for prayer. For, with regard to what is past, there will be a necessity of humbly imploring his Creator to forgive all his sudden surprises, his numberless failings, weaknesses, and defects. He will likewise find cause to thank the giver of every good gift, for all temporal and spiritual benefits; for all deliverances, encouragements, warnings, comforts, and salutary chastisements, that have produced the peaceable fruits of righteousness, which lie

is now going joyfully to reap in eternity. As for what is to come, he will have cause to pray to God partly for others, and partly for himself.

It will behove him to pray for those whom he has inconsiderately offended; that God will be pleased to efface from their minds the impression of such offence. He should pray for those who have hated and persecuted him without a cause; that God will be pleased to convert them, and forgive their trespasses. He ought to pray for those who in his lifetime have loved him, and shewed him kindness; that God would reward them in time and eternity. He should pray for his family and relations whom he leaves behind in an evil and perverse world, among so many snares and seducements; that God would be pleased to guide, comfort, bless, and support them. Lastly, he should pray for the whole church militant on earth; that its blessed head may take it under his care and protection, and defend, enlarge, and succour it.

But for himself, he is to pray according to the substance of our Saviour's prayer, contained in the Psalm before us; according to which a dying Christian is to regulate his prayer.

1. Does our Saviour in this prayer say, 'Let me never be ashamed;' so should a Christian borrow these words from him, and likewise pray to God, that the confidence which he has placed in him may not be confounded.

2. Does Jesus Christ further pray, 'Deliver me in thy righteousness;' so may a dying Christian even appeal to the Divine justice, which is now appeased and satisfied by the blood of the Mediator.

3. Does our dying Saviour say, 'Bow down thine ear speedily;' so a dying Christian, especially in great agonies of mind or violent pains, may, with resignation, pray for the shortening of his sufferings, and for speedy succour from God.

4. Does our dying Saviour say, 'Be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me;' so a dying disciple of Christ, seeing his death-bed surrounded by so many spiritual enemies, makes this high rock his refuge and house of defence, and prays to be admitted into it.

5. Does Christ pray, saying, 'For thy names' sake lead me and guide me;' so may a dying Christian call upon God, and pray that he will lead him through the gloomy valley of the shadow of death, and bring him into the light of a blessed eternity.

6. Lastly, has the dying Mediator said, 'Pull me out of the net, that they have laid privily for me, for thou art my strength;' so may a dying Christian request the like favour of his heavenly Father. For, as satan, like an eager hunter, lies in wait for the soul of a dying person, watches every circumstance, and spreads before his sight the net of his former sins, the remembrance of which he revives, and increases the number by many false accusations; he may likewise pray, that the mighty hand of God would draw him out of his net.

But here it may be asked, May not a dying Christain supplicate God for the abatement of his bodily pains, for the recovery of his health, and the lengthening of his life; that he may be a farther benefit to his family, and further endeavour to finish the work of his sanctification? To this I answer, He may indeed make such requests to his Creator, but with an entire resignation to his sacred will; and in this he has a pattern set him by his Saviour, who in his prayer on the Mount of Olives, said, 'Not my will, but thine be done.'

Secondly, Such a preparation for death requires the exercise of faith. Our blessed Saviour, in the next place, thus begins his last prayer: 'In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust.' This filial confidence and faith in God he retained to the last moment of his life. Thus must a dying Christain first lay hold of the

shield of faith, that he may thereby quench the fiery darts of the wicked. This shield must be held up against all the charges and accusations of satan, with which he, at that time, endeavours to testify the conscience.

A believer may therefore express himself in this confidential manner: "The devil has no power over me; it is against Thee only that I have sinned, O thou that pardonest iniquity! What mean these proud claims of satan? It is not he that can prescribe laws to me; he has no share in those whom thou, O Lord, dost love: Depart from me thou accursed spirit, I know that I am the Lord's. O blessed Jesus, I am thy property; witness thy blood, that thou hast redeemed me from sin! What then can these assaults of satan mean? Why does he threaten me with the terrors of the Divine wrath at the tribunal of God? Come therefore, and assert the honour of thy meritorious passion: And since thou hast so dearly purchased me, I may rest assured that thou wilt not deliver me into the hands of an accursed enemy. No, my dearest Saviour; I know that I am thine unalienable portion; and therefore I smile at all distress and violence. Though the thunders of the law, of hell, and of death, roar against me, and their feeble lightnings flash about me, I know no fear. In life I am thine, and shall continue under thy protection after death." This is the language of faith against the accusation of satan at the hour of death.

This shield of faith must likewise be opposed to the terrors of death, that the believer may be able thus boldly to express himself: "To others, death may seem the king of terrors, but to me he wears a milder aspect; for O thou most precious fountain of life, who forsakest none who come unto thee! in thee I rest soul, body, and spirit. Who would be terrified when he is arrived at the end of his journey, and finds himself safe, after passing through roads beset with robbers and assassins? I therefore leave this

gloomy wilderness with joy, to enter into those eternal mansions which are enlightened by the glory of God, and of which the Lamb is the light, (Rev. xxi. 22.)

Now faith, indeed, embraces every promise revealed in the gospel; but more particularly the promise of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, and of the salvation of those who believe in the name of the Son of God. Therefore it may be of great use,

1. To consider the former mercies, guidances, and deliverances, which we have experienced from God in the course of our lives.

2. To consider the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, by which God has been reconciled, and death disarmed.

3. A devout participation of the holy sacrament, which has often been wonderfully efficacious in strengthening the faith of dying Christians.

Thirdly, To such a preparation for death likewise belongs the exercise of hope, of which our suffering Saviour has likewise left us a pattern, by saying in the text, 'In thee O Lord do I put my trust!' This hope of a dying Christian is chiefly directed to the blessedness of the future life promised in the gospel; and is grounded on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, by which we are born again to a lively hope of a better life. The more certain this hope is, the more it shews itself, both in an ardent desire to depart and to be with Christ, and in a comfortable joy and alacrity of the mind.

Fourthly and lastly, Such a reparation must be attended with the exercise of an entire offering of one's self up to God. This consists in calmly resigning ourselves to our wise Creator, and referring all circumstances relating to sickness, life or death, to him; and particularly in recommending our souls into those mighty and faithful hands, into which the Son of God recommended his Spirit. This fourfold exercise of prayer, faith, hope, and resignation to God, consti-

tutes the true and immediate preparation of a pious Christian for death.

Therefore consider, all ye who still make it your sole employment to fulfil the lusts of your flesh; all ye who make earthly things, as wealth, honour, ease, and voluptuousness, your supreme felicity, and act as if you had a continuing city here, and were to live in it forever: consider that you are heaping up matter for a miserable death: And if you proceed in this beaten tract, your last moments, unless the grace of God should interpose to awaken your sleeping consciences, will be attended with terrible disquietude, and inexpressible agonies of mind. Alas, how wretched will be your condition when, lifting up your eyes, you see nothing before you but horror, misery, and torture! If you look back to your former life, there all is sin, guilt, and impiety; if you look forward, behold an eternity of agonizing torments and despair! Above you stands an incensed Judge; under you the abyss of hell is opened; and even within you, you will hear the clamours, and sensibly feel the stings of conscience, the silent witness and accuser of your most secret sins and evil thoughts. Do not flatter yourselves with a vain hope, or think that all may be set to rights with a few broken sighs; think not that only crying out, God be merciful to me a sinner! is a sufficient atonement for a life of impiety. Alas! repentance is too arduous, too important a work, to be thus huddled over. When the body is struggling with the pains of the distemper, and the conscience is at the same time terrified with the wrath of God, and the horrors of death, What strength can be left for such a conflict? Therefore, while you are in the days of your health, and are not deprived of an ability of sinning; in the name of Jesus Christ renounce the service of sin, and give yourselves to him who has shed his precious blood on the cross, and acquired for you a right to a blessed eternity. Settle your account with heaven in time, that all remaining to be

done on your death bed may be, to die tranquil and serene.

As for you who have received the grace of God, be not remiss in your conflict against sin; be not negligent in perfecting your sanctification, in the fear of God. Think not that you may finish the remainder of your work on your sick bed, and there make up any deficiency in your account, before it is finally closed. Do ye then know how many hours you will have for your preparation on your death bed? Are ye assured that your distemper will be of such a nature, as to leave you in full possession of your understanding till the last moment? Habituate yourselves in due time to the performance of those duties, on which your mind will be employed in your last hours; so that, if the Lord is pleased to grant you time, your last hour may be an hour of triumph; and that if, on the other hand, you should be suddenly surprised by death, yet your souls shall suffer no detriment, but pass calmly into life.

As for you, ye timerous, but believing and upright souls, be not cast down with the apprehension of death, and ask whence should joy come in a dying hour, after such long and severe conflicts with dejection, fear, and dread? God can suddenly roll the weighty stone of the fear of death from your hearts, and comfort you with the hope of a glorious resurrection.

Look unto Jesus the author and finisher of your faith, and obey his divine precepts in the time of your life; and this will be the most effectual means not only for dying happily but joyfully; so that in the hour appointed for your last in the counsel of your heavenly Father, you may say with joy, 'It is finished! Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit!'

THE PRAYER.

Now all praise be to thee, O faithful and ever living Saviour, for sanctifying our last hours by thine, and

leaving us therein a glorious pattern for our imitation. Behold! the last moments of our lives are still before us, and none of us know how many steps they have to the end of their journey. Grant therefore, to every one a wise and understanding heart, not to put off his preparation for death, till the last moments of his life; but that in the days of health, he may give up his heart to thee, disentangle himself from the accursed snares of sin, and endeavour by thy grace to transplant himself from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light; so that he may know whither to fly for refuge when the terrors of death assault his soul. Those who are already passed from death unto life, and in whom the foundation of a lively hope of a blessed eternity is laid, do thou daily animate, and every morning awaken them with the thoughts, that every day may be their last; so that thus they may always keep their loins girded, and their lamps burning. Graciously stand by them in their last conflict, so that all who attend their death bed may behold their joy and tranquility, and learn to prepare for such an exit. Grant this for the sake of thy glorious name. Amen.

CONSIDERATION X.

THE PRODIGIES WHICH HAPPENED AT THE DEATH OF THE LORD JESUS.

'AND behold the vail of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened; and the bodies of many saints who slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion who stood over against him, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw that

he so cried out, and the earthquake, and those things that were done; they feared greatly, and glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man; truly this was the Son of God. And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned. And all his acquaintance, and the women that had followed him from Gallilee, among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less, and the mother of Joses, and Salome, and the mother of Zebedee's children, who also, when he was in Gallilee followed him and ministered unto him, and many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem, stood afar off beholding these things,' (Matt. xxvii. 51—56. Mark xv. 38—41. Luke xxiii. 45.—49.)

In explaining these words we shall consider,

First, The miracles which followed our Saviour's death.

Secondly, The effect which those miraculous events had on the spectators.

I. No sooner had the blessed Jesus bowed his head, and commended his soul into the hands of his Father, than a most extraordinary scene of wonders opened to the unbelieving Jews, to certify that the person who was just departed, was he, whom Isaiah emphatically stiles WONDERFUL. (Isaiah ix. 6.) As our blessed Saviour's birth was attended with a glorious apparition of the heavenly host, which descended from heaven praising and glorifying God; so now at his death, our earth felt strange convulsions, unknown at the death of any person before.

In considering these wonderful phenomena, we shall in general observe the two following particulars.

First, The end and design of them.

Secondly, The signification of these miraculous events.

The first general observation is this: As God in all the extraordinary operations of his omnipotence has

always the wisest views; so had he likewise some wise design in exhibiting these wonders. If we reflect a little on the causes and end of them, we may learn,

1. That by these extraordinary phenomena, God intended to awaken the attention of stupid, thoughtless men; and to induce them to consider the death of this extraordinary person, and enquire into the cause of it.

2. It was God's design, by these miracles, to retrieve the honour of his Son, which had been extremely injured by an ignominious crucifixion, and to give a public testimony of his innocence. The Lord Jesus, when he was nailed to the cross, would give no proof of his miraculous power, nor deliver himself from suffering death, as his enemies required; but referred the manifestation of his innocence to his Almighty Father. And this amiable temper he had already shewn, when he said, 'I seek not mine own glory; there is one that seeketh and judgeth,' (John viii. 50.) Now this saying of Christ was here verified. For when the Son of God had expired on the cross in the utmost ignominy and reproach, the Father came forth from his secret sanctuary, and vindicated the honour of his Son who had been numbered among the transgressors, by commanding even the inanimate creation, in an extraordinary manner, as it were to celebrate his obsequies.

3. By these wonderful events, not only our blessed Saviour's innocence, but likewise his Divine majesty and glory were eminently displayed. He had been sentenced to die for falsely pretending to be the Son of God, as his infatuated enemies imagined: But now, all nature by an extraordinary tremor shewed, that the Lord of nature expired; that God manifested in the flesh was departed; that the Prince of life was put to death; and that the Lord of glory was crucified.

4. This manifestation of the Divine power, which fell out at the crucifixion of our Saviour, is a salutary antidote against the offence of the cross. To reason, indeed, it may at first sight appear something strange, to believe in one who died on the cross, and to expect eternal life from him. But if a rational man reflects, how signally God himself glorified this crucified person at his death, it will inspire him with better thoughts of him, and make him look on the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus in a very different light, from that of an evil doer.

The second general observation relates to the signification of these prodigies; which are of such a nature, as, at the same time, to have a certain signification, relatively to the unbelieving Jews, and also to believers. They are so particularly ordered by the Divine wisdom, as very significantly to represent the power and effect of our Saviour's death; and this will the more plainly appear, on considering each of these prodigies in their order.

The first miraculous event, which followed our Saviour's death, was the rending the vail of the temple: 'And behold,' says the evangelist, (Matt. xxvii. 51.) 'the vail of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.' In the temple were two vails, one of which hung before the door leading into the sanctuary*, and the other before the door, or opening, into the Holy of Holies, and these were made of azure, purple, and scarlet silk threads curiously interwoven, and embroidered with the most beautiful flowers and cherubims. But the latter of these vails only is here spoken of†. If one considers that, ac-

* See Josephus's Jewish Antiquities, B VIII. C. 3.

† This vail, which St. Paul mentions in his Epistle to the Hebrews. (Chap. ix. v. 3.) in the second Temple, supplied the place of the partition wall, which divided the Sanctuary from the Holy of Holies in Solomon's Temple, mentioned 1 Kings vi. 16. For in the second Temple, there were two vails that hung down from two large beams, one towards the Sanctuary, and the other towards the Holy of Holies.

cording to the testimony even of the Jews themselves, this vail was of a most curious and strong texture like tapestry, and was thirty ells in length and four fingers thick; that it was no old tattered curtain, but a masterly piece of art lately woven, for a new vail was made and hung up in the temple every year; and lastly, that this strong vail hung in a place where it could not be damaged by the weather; the hand of God must necessarily be acknowledged to have been concerned in the rending of it. What a terror must this sudden and unexpected rent have struck into the Priests, who probably were performing the service in the sanctuary, lighting the lamps of the golden candlestick, and burning incense! for it was about the time of evening sacrifice. How must they have been terrified with the sight of the vail, thus rent at once, by which means the Holy of Holies was exposed to the view of the people. For they had hitherto carefully concealed this sacred place from the eyes of all the other priests by the partition vail, beyond which only the High Priest was to enter; and that only once a year, on the great day of atonement.

If we now enquire into the signification of this first prodigy, we shall find that,

1. With regard to the unbelieving Jews, it was a very melancholy event. Hitherto God had dwelt in the temple within the Holy of Holies, over the ark of the covenant, and there manifested his presence in a peculiar manner. Hence this place was accounted so sacred, that no mortal eye was to look into it; and for this end, God had directed this thick vail to be made. But now, God having rent it himself, and thus, as it were, opened the door of the Holy of Holies, that every one might look into it; he thereby intended to signify, that, from a just indignation and displeasure against the wickedness of his people and their priests, in putting the Lord of the temple to death, he would from that time leave this his dwelling, (Matt. xxiii. 38.) and prophane his sanctuary by giving it up to the eyes

and hands of unbelievers. This afterwards came to pass, when the temple was destroyed by the Romans; for the holy vessels were taken out of the temple by the soldiers, and exhibited as a public show in the triumph by Titus Vespatianus, who had conducted the siege of Jerusalem. The night before our Saviour's crucifixion, the High Priest, from an hypocritical zeal, had rent his garments when he heard the Lord Jesus declare himself to be the Son of God; and now, God himself rends that vail with which, while he dwelt in the Holy of Holies, he as it were, cloathed, and veiled himself, and thereby confirms his Son's declaration, which the High Priest had called blasphemy.

2. But to the faithful this rending of the vail is a joyful type, representing that an entrance was then opened to them into the sanctuary, which is not made with hands. Hitherto the flesh of Jesus Christ, by the imputation of our sins to him, had hung before it as a vail. But when this vail was rent at the separation of his soul and body by death, and Jesus Christ, the true High Priest, had himself with his own blood entered into the holy place, *i. e.* into heaven; the way to the throne of grace is cleared of all obstacles, heaven is laid open, and the covering which hung before the mysteries of the Levitical worship is removed, (Isaiah xxv. 7.) The church militant on earth, which was prefigured by the sanctuary, and the church triumphant in heaven, the Antitype of the Holy of Holies, are now united with each other; the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, namely, the ceremonial law, together with the whole Levitical economy, is thrown down. Therefore the Apostle thus speaks to all those whose hearts are rent with true repentance: 'Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he has consecrated for us through the vail, that is to say, his flesh; and having an High Priest over the house of God, let us

draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith; having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water,' (Heb. x. 19, 20, 21, 22.) These were the glorious mysteries prefigured by this wonderful event.

A pious Christian, attentively meditating on this remarkable incident, may very justly cry out, I thank thee, O my Saviour, who, for my good, hast suffered the vail of thy flesh which hung, as it were, before the Divinity within thee, to be rent; so that through thee, my Mediator, I can now not only look into the heavenly sanctuary with the eye of faith, but likewise through thee I am enabled even to enter into it, and with confidence approach the throne of grace. O my Redeemer, I honour the day of thy death, as the day of my atonement! I rejoice that in thee I have a merciful High Priest, who, with his own blood, has entered into the Holy of Holies, and accomplished the work of eternal redemption. Stretch forth thy mighty hand, and from the top to the bottom rend all the coverings of hypocrisy and wickedness, which thou findest before my heart, and which would preclude thine entrance into it. But, as a thick vail or covering of many prejudices still hangs before the eyes and heart of that wretched nation that crucified thee, and among whom thou didst take the human nature upon thee; be pleased to rend those vails, that they may see in thee the accomplishment of all the shadowy types of the law, and behold thy glory with open face.

The second prodigy, which happened at our Saviour's death, was a violent earthquake, mentioned only by St. Matthew, who says, 'The earth did quake,' or was moved. How far this violent shock extended cannot be determined with any precision. It is, however, certain, that it was felt in Judea, and that it shook Mount Golgotha with the neighbouring parts, and the foundations of the city of Jerusalem, so that it reeled like a drunken man, (Isaiah xxiv. 20.)

Thus the earth, and perhaps the whole globe, gave extraordinary tokens of its sympathy with its Creator, who was so terribly injured, and of its detestation of the atrocious crime then committed by the Jews. Therefore as the sun, by God's interposition, had before withdrawn its brightness, that it might not give light to the profligacy of the bold blasphemers, who stood round our Saviour's cross; so now, also, the earth, by its violent convulsions, indicates that it trembled at the impiety of those wretches who crucified HIM, by whose majestic voice on Mount Sinai the earth had been formerly moved, (Exod. xix. 18. Heb. xii. 26.) as it is now shaken a second time by the loud cry, with which he gave up the Ghost.

But as to the signification of this second prodigy, it prognosticated no good to the Jewish nation. By this earthquake, God not only manifested his anger at their wickedness, which had been carried to its highest pitch in the crucifixion of his Son; for the effects of God's wrath are in scripture represented under the image of an earthquake; (Joel iii. 16. Psalm xviii. 7.) but he also secretly intimated to them, that both their religion and policy should be shaken by violent concussions, should be removed from their place, and be utterly destroyed and abolished, as St. Paul observes in the epistle to the Hebrews, (Heb. xii. 26, 27.)

On the other hand, this earthquake was an emblem of the blessed motions to be caused in those hearts which had hitherto been carnally minded, by the preaching of the crucified Jesus, especially among the Gentiles, (Hagai ii. 7, 8.) As the mountains skipped, and the earth trembled before the Lord, (Psalm cxiv. 6, 7.) formerly at the deliverance of the children of Israel out of Egypt; so this earthquake shews, that now the true redemption of mankind from the hands of all their enemies is accomplished by the death of Jesus Christ.

: Alas! may a pious Christian say, How am I ashamed, that my heart remains so unmoved at the consideration of my Saviour's death, when the earth itself trembled and shook on the account of it! By the power of thy death, O blessed Jesus, kill in me all earthly and sinful inclinations. May this awful truth, That the Son of God died for my sins, affect me with a holy trembling and a salutary dread at the great severity of God's justice, which appears so conspicuously in this instance. But, in the consideration of this comfortable truth, namely, That by thy death I am reconciled with God, fill my heart with holy emotions, and grateful love. Grant that I may exult for joy, on account of the great salvation obtained for me by thy death, and at the noble freedom in which I am placed by the redemption thou hast wrought.

The third prodigy that attended the death of Christ is related in these words: 'The rocks rent.' This, in some measure, was an effect of the preceding earthquake. The country about Jerusalem was very mountainous and rocky; hence it is said in the Psalms, 'As the mountains are round about Jerusalem,' (Psalm cxxv. 2.) Now these rocks and hills were so shaken by the earthquake, that huge masses of some of them tumbled down from the summits into the valleys; others were rent with large clefts and fissures. Probably, this miracle displayed itself first on that rock where Christ was crucified, and was afterwards propagated to the adjacent parts, in which, to this very day, are seen very wide chasms and fissures in the rocks, as memorials of this prodigy.

This rending of the rocks, with regard to the unbelieving Jews, was likewise a token of God's anger at their wickedness, for 'his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him,' (Nah. i. 6.) These rent rocks put the Jewish people in mind, that the earth only waited the order of its Creator to open its mouth, and swallow up the rebellious

crew of the enemies of Christ, as it formerly had swallowed Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, (Num. xvi. 31.) It reminded them of the Lord Jesus's pathetic speech to the women of Jerusalem, when he was led up Mount Golgotha; in which he had predicted to the Jewish nation such calamitous times, that in their despair they would say to the mountains, Fall on us! and to the hills, Cover us!

But, at the same time, this rending of the rocks was an emblem of the conversation of the Gentiles. For, by the preaching of the cross, the very hardest hearts, hearts obdurate as a rock were rent and made contrite; and of this, the first specimen was seen in the Roman Centurion and the rest, who stood watching Jesus by the cross, (Matt. xxvii. 54.)

Here may a true believer say, alas! my heart has by nature all the hardness of a rock; may it more and more be rent by the salutary impressions of God's holy spirit, that he may find admittance therein.—And as I see about me so many other flinty hearts, on which the powerful arrows of thy word make no impression, oh my Saviour, be merciful likewise to them; and may they by the power of thy death be also rent and bruised!

The fourth prodigy that fell out at our Saviour's death was the opening of the graves: 'And the graves were opened.' The sepulchres of the opulent Jews were mostly hewn in rocks; so that when the rocks were rent from each other, many graves also were opened. However, this was absolutely a distinct miracle from the former. For the divine omnipotence, which had displayed itself by rending the rocks also wrought on particular places where certain saints were buried, and opened their graves.

With this opening of the sepulchres another miracle was connected; which properly came to pass on the morning, when our Saviour arose from the dead. For, by the power of Christ, 'many bodies of saints who slept arose, and came out of their graves after his

resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.' (Matt. xxvii. 52, 53.) Who these saints were, whose graves thus opened, is only a matter of probable conjecture. They are supposed to be, in in general, such devout persons as, in their life-time, had waited for the coming of the Messiah, and had wished to see his days; and now their wishes were accomplished even in their death. This honor may have been conferred, in the first place, on the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, the two last of whom had, at their death, left a particular charge, that their bones should not be buried in Egypt, where they died, but in the land of Canaan, (Gen. xlvii. 29,30. l. 24, 25.)

Next to these, this favour may be conferred on some of the Prophets, who had prophesied of the Messiah, and whose sepulchres the Jews had hitherto beautified. Lastly, among these Saints who arose, there might be some who were lately departed, as Simeon, Hannah, Zechariah, John the baptist, &c. who must have been known by those to whom they appeared. These graves were now opened by the death of our blessed Lord, as a proof of the truth of what he had before asserted, saying, (John v. 28.) 'The hour is coming, in the which all that are in their graves shall hear the voice' [of the Son of God.] St. Matthew says, that these Saints came out of the graves, and made their appearance to many in Jerusalem after our Saviour's resurrection. Therefore, it is probable, that they were not restored to life till the morning when Christ rose from the dead, who was to be the first fruits of them that slept, (1 Cor. xv. 20.) and are to rise to life everlasting. It is therefore supposed by some learned men, that these Saints were restored to life in the instant when Christ expired on the cross, and when there graves were opened they came out of them; but that it was not till after Christ rose from the dead, that they went into the holy city and appeared unto many, as witnesses of the resurrection.

This miraculous opening of the graves is, on one side, a reproach to the Jews for having put Him to death, whose coming all the Saints of their own nation had so ardently longed for. But, on the other hand, believers may be convinced by it, that Jesus Christ has not only put an end to the bondage of the law, and brought the prisoners out of the pit, (Gal. iii. 23. Zach. ix. 11.) but that he has likewise, by his death, destroyed the power of death and hell, (Heb. ii. 14.) that, one day, he will again open the graves of all Saints departed under the old and new covenant; and that he will bring them forth alive, glorify them and introduce them into the heavenly Jerusalem.

Here may a devout soul say, O my Saviour, the longer I abide by thy cross, the higher thoughts I entertain of thy sacred Person. The first prodigy after thy death teaches me, that thou art the real High Priest who is entered with his blood into the Holy of Holies. The second and third miracle assure me, that thou art the author of nature, which here sympathised with thee. The fourth prodigy convinces me that thou art the Prince of life, and the Conqueror of death; that thou canst demolish the marks of triumph which he has set up among mankind, force his strong prison, deprive him of the spoils, and rescue his captives. Therefore, in the first place, rouse me from my carnal security; call me forth from the grave of my sins, in which I naturally lie; roll away the stone which shuts it up; and place in my heart a lively hope, that, on the day of thine appearance, when thy enlivening voice shall prevade all the mansions of the dead, and when all the spoils of death shall be torn from him, I also may come forth from my grave, and behold thy refulgent countenance in glory.

II. We come, in the second place, to consider the effect which these miraculous events had on the spectators. Among these spectators were,

First. The Roman Centurion, who commanded the party of soldiers at the crucifixion of our Lord, and now

stood opposite to the cross with his men watching Jesus. This officer had taken particular notice, that the death of Jesus was followed by such unheard of agitations throughout all Nature, as if it lay in the agonies of death.

Now the effect which the sight of these miracles had on him, as the Evangelist tells us, was as follows:

1. 'He feared greatly.' His heart was also shaken, and inspired with a holy fear of God, whose omnipotent hand was so manifestly visible in these extraordinary phenomena. He began to reflect with horror on what he and his soldiers had been doing; that they had injured a person who, even in his death, had more power than the combined force of all the living, and whose last voice shook the foundations of the earth.

2. 'He glorified God.' He praised the God of Israel, and acknowledged that he does great and wonderful things; that he can darken the sun, shake the earth, rend the rocks, open the graves and cause them to eject the dead; things infinitely beyond the power of all the heathen deities.

3. He acknowledges the crucified Jesus to be a righteous man, and the Son of God. For, according to St. Luke, he said, 'Certainly this was a righteous man;' but according to St. Matthew and Mark, his words were, 'Truly this man was the Son of God.' In this acknowledgment or confession of Christ, we may observe two degrees of illumination. In the first place, from the extraordinary circumstances attending our Saviour's death, he acknowledges his innocence. He declares that he was a righteous and good man, innocent of all those crimes which had been laid to his charge, and consequently most undeservedly sentenced to, and punished with death. But from this first step, the Spirit of God leads him farther; for he also acknowledges the Divine glory of Christ. He asserts that this innocent, righteous Man was, in a particular manner, related to the Deity; and that he did not only, according to the accusation of the Jews, pretend to

he the Son of God, but that he actually was the Son of the most high God. This he affirms in the strongest manner: 'Certainly this was a righteous man; truly this was the Son of God.' Thus God confirms by this Pagan officer the declaration, which Christ had made before the Sanhedrim, and for which he had been condemned as a blasphemer. As the lips of the Jewish priests, which were 'to keep the knowledge of the Messiah,' (Mal. ii. 7.) foamed out blasphemies against Christ, God caused his glory to be proclaimed by the mouth of a Pagan soldier, for a presage that now he would make Him known among the Gentiles, whom the unbelieving Jews had rejected.

Secondly, The Pagan soldiers, who were under the command of this Centurion, and, in all appearance, had hitherto mocked Christ and insulted him in Pilate's hall of judgment, were among the spectators. The effect these miracles had on them was, that they also were afraid and terrified; for St. Matthew says, 'When the Centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, saw the earthquake and those things that were done, they feared greatly.' Hence it is evident, that not only the commanding officer felt such emotions in his heart; but that his example made an impression on the soldiers under his command, whose stony hearts the Almighty likewise rent, and kindled in them a light to discern the innocency and dignity of Jesus. This was not merely the effect of the prodigies which they saw, but likewise of our Saviour's gracious intercession which they had likewise heard, when he cried, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do;' and which thus began already to be accomplished on Mount Golgotha.

Thirdly, There were Jews among the spectators, the greatest part of whom stood about the cross out of mere curiosity, either reviling Christ or gazing on him. Concerning these St. Luke makes the following observation: 'And all the people that came together to that sight,' where God so suddenly altered

the scene, and so unexpectedly glorified the abased and derided Jesus, 'beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.' In this account two particulars are specified.

1. They smote their breasts. That action did not proceed only from wonder and amazement; but expressed their concern, their grief, and repentance for what they had done. They were greatly troubled that they had suffered themselves to be so far misled by their rulers, as to reject this person, and had offered him so many injuries, indignities, and abuse. Then was fulfilled the saying of the blessed Jesus, (John viii. 28.) 'When ye have lift up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am He,' *i. e.* the Messiah, who was promised to your fathers.

2. 'They returned.' By this expression is meant not only that they returned to Jerusalem, to their homes, to reflect farther on these things by themselves; but likewise in some measure from their evil ways, into the good way which Jesus had preached unto them. All these people, we may be sure, were not of the same temper and disposition. In some this was no more than a transitory fright and fleeting emotion, which soon vanished again out of their minds, without bringing forth any fruit. On the minds of others the impression was deeper, and consequently had a better effect. But it is remarkable, that we read not a word of the chief priests, pharisees, or rulers of the people, being in the least moved at these wonderful phenomena. We do not hear of their beating their breasts, and returning. These hardened hypocrites 'regarded not the work of the Lord, neither considered the operation of his hands,' (Isaiah v. 12.) To avoid the appearance of having acted wrong, they would not own the God of Isreal to be in the right; and even after the death of our blessed Saviour, they exclaimed against him as a deceiver, (Matt. xxvii. 63.)

Fourthly, Among the spectators were also some of Christ's followers of both sexes. St. Luke observes,

that 'all his acquaintance were there, and the women that followed him from Galilee.' St. Matthew and St. Mark particularly specify Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less, and the mother of Joses, and Salome, and the mother of John and James the Elder, the sons of Zebedee. The last of these, together with her sons, had declared, that they would also drink the cup which Jesus was to drink of, (Matt. xx. 22, 23.) Therefore she was now led by her love for him, to attend our Saviour to the last moment of his life, and by a sensible compassion must have tasted something of the bitterness of his sufferings and of his last agony. Of all these persons the Evangelists observe,

1. 'That they stood afar off.' Probably they could not with any conveniency come nearer, on account of the croud; but in this distance that prophecy in the Psalms (Psalm xxxviii. 11.) was likewise accomplished: 'My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off. Thou hast put away my acquaintance far from me,' (Psalm lxxxviii. 8.) It is farther said of them,

2. That they were looking on; and consequently were witnesses both of the death of Christ, and of the miracles that attended it. Thus was the blessed seed of the woman, at his death, surrounded with devout women.

No mention is made by the Evangelists of the effect which these prodigies had on their minds.— They had no occasion to beat their breasts, and to lament that they had injured the blessed Jesus. Their consciences witnessed better things to these devout women. Therefore, though the earth shook and trembled under their feet; yet they could lift up their heads with confidence. But it is very probable that a violent conflict of hope and despair, of faith and unbelief, passed in their souls. They saw Jesus die of whom they had hoped that he was to redeem Israel, and whom they had accompained to Jerusalem with a

persuasion that the kingdom of God would immediately appear, (Luke xix. 11.) At this instant, the idea of the earthly kingdom of the Messiah must have been extinguished in their souls, and their hope of seeing it vanished at our Saviour's death. But their faith might derive a powerful encouragement from the miracles, with which God honoured this melancholy catastrophe. Here all nature, as it were, cried aloud in behalf of the innocence of Jesus, which had been oppressed by the many false accusations and calumnies of the Jewish rulers. What an impression must it have made on them, to see all the people beating their breasts and returning; and to hear even the Roman officer and the soldiers publicly owning the crucified person to be the son of God? They concluded from hence, that they had not followed Jesus, and ministered unto him with their substance in vain, and that possibly the matter might have quite another issue than his enemies expected. They saw how suddenly their invidious joy was interrupted by these dreadful prodigies at the death of Jesus; and concluded that God could still do greater things than these, and consequently that they might farther hope in his goodness.

We shall conclude this consideration with the following inferences from what has been said on the subject.

1. A Godly fear is usually the first effect of a serious consideration of the passion and death of Jesus Christ.

Thus the spectators of our blessed Saviour's death beat their breasts for trouble and remorse; and when our evil consciences accuses us, it can be no otherwise with us. When a person reflects, that his sins have been the cause of the crucifixion of the glorious Son of God, what violent emotions must it not awaken in his heart? Such emotions will mortify in us all natural pride, arrogance, and self-love. Hence we learn to humble ourselves before God, and stand in awe of his just displeasure.

By this the foundation of repentance is laid; so that afterwards the sufferings of Christ are viewed as a mirror of grace and felicity. But we are not to give over the work of conversion at these legal fears; which, it is to be apprehended, was the case of many of the spectators of our Saviour's passion. We must proceed farther, and dwell in contemplation on the affecting subject, till the heart is molified and changed, so as to conceive a hatred and abhorrence for sin.

2. As God has glorified his Son after his great abasement; so when his children have fought the good fight of faith, and endured sufferings, he will bring them also to glory.

Who would have conceived that our blessed Lord, while he was hanging on the cross covered with blood and reproach, would have received such an encomium as soon as he expired, and that from a Pagan soldier? 'Certainly this was a righteous man, truly this was the Son of God!' yet such was the issue to which the providence of God brought this tragical affair. Thus, in the fight of affliction we must continue true to the end. Such a conduct will also make a happy impression on others; and even those who in our life time have hated, mocked, and persecuted us, will, at our death, bear witness that we have faithfully served our Lord and Saviour, and were his true disciples.

3. It is then only that the death of Christ produces its true effect in us, when it has kindled the spiritual life in our souls.

The spiritual life is, indeed, properly one of the fruits of the resurrection of our Lord: Hence St. Peter observes, 'That we are begotten again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,' (1 Peter i. 3.) However, the foundation of it is already laid in Christ's triumphant death. Thus, in the instance before us, at the death of our blessed Saviour, every good principle, which hitherto seemed dead in the hearts of the spectators, received new

life; and this life manifested itself by the tongues of these men, which proclaimed the innocence and glory of Jesus, by the hands which beat their breasts, and by the feet with which they returned in a better disposition. The death of Christ must still have this blessed effect in us, viz. of imparting to us a new life, which will manifest itself in all the members of our bodies; so that they will no longer be given up to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but to the service of him who died and rose again for us.

THE PRAYER.

O FAITHFUL Saviour, we praise thee, who didst even on thy cross begin to fulfil thy word; namely, when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me. O that it many please thee also to draw those who are farthest from thee, and still harbour a sinful contempt of thy reproach! Teach them to acknowledge, that thy ignominious death is the only means by which our death must be overcome, and the guilt of our sins blotted out. Incline all our hearts to contemplate thy meritorious death; and grant that we may, in due time, enjoy the precious fruits of it. Rend the veil of our prejudices, shake our obdurate and refractory hearts; and open the grave of our sins, that we may come forth to a new life. Grant that we may beat our breasts, as a token of Godly sorrow, and return from our evil ways. Thus, O blessed Jesus, may every thing which passed outwardly at thy death, be fulfilled within us. Have mercy upon us, O thou Lamb of God, and hear us for the sake of thy meritorious death and passion! Amen.

CONSIDERATION XI.

THE LAST INDIGNITY OFFERED TO THE BODY OF THE LORD JESUS ON THE CROSS.

'THE Jews, therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross

on the Sabbath day, [for that Sabbath day was an high day,] besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other who was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side; and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that this Scripture should be fulfilled, a bone of him shall not be broken; and again another Scripture saith, they shall look on him whom they pierced,' (John xix. 31—37.)

In these words, St. John, who was an eye witness of the transaction, relates the last insult done to the body of his Lord and master, while it hung on the cross. In this narrative we have an account of a twofold indignity offered to the body of Jesus.

First, One, which was not put in execution.

Secondly, Another which, by the Divine permission, was committed on it for good and wise ends.

I. The first indignity, which was designed against the sacred body of our Lord, was the breaking of his legs; But though such an indignity was intended by the soldiers; yet it was averted by a higher power.

First, That this indignity was intended, we may learn from the request of the Jews to Pilate, namely, That the legs of those who were crucified might be broken, and that their bodies might be taken away, (John xix. 31.) Thus the Jews, by whom we are here to understand the rulers, chief priests, scribes, and elders, proposed to treat the body of the Lord Jesus with such indignity. As for the Jewish people, the miracles which attended the death of the Lord Jesus had so affected them, that they were gone away beating their breasts. Even the very Roman Centurion, who commanded the party of soldiers that watch-

ed the cross, had together with his soldiers glorified God, and publicly acknowledged, that the crucified Jesus was not only a righteous man, but the Son of God. The doctors and rulers of the Jewish people still continued obdurate and insensible. The earth had been shaken under their feet, and the rocks were rent; but their stony hearts were still unmoved, unbroken, and without the least apparent sign of sorrow, or awe of the Divine majesty.

This is indeed a most melancholy sight. But let us withdraw our eyes from those hardened miscreants, and turn them inwardly on our own hearts. How often has the death of Jesus Christ been set forth to us? How often has our blessed Saviour, extended on the cross, been so represented to us, as if he had been crucified among us? But are our obdurate hearts softened or broken by the representation? Is our stubborn evil disposition overcome? In the last Consideration, the prodigies which attended the death of Christ, have been illustrated and explained; but what is the effect and impression of them on the reader's mind? Has thy carnal heart shook before God, on hearing that the earth shook at thy Saviour's death? Hast thou been so moved by it, as to beat thy breast; and seriously to resolve on returning from the ways of injustice and covetousness, of uncleanness and intemperance, of pride and anger?

The Jews therefore now applied to Pilate with a double request. They desired of him,

1. That the crucified bodies might be taken down from the cross before sun set; and,

2. That their legs might be broken, in order to hasten their death; since it was acting contrary to the laws, as well as the dictates of humanity, to take those alive from the cross, who had been condemned to die.

That the reader may better understand the nature of this request of the Jews, it is necessary to observe, that those malefactors who were crucified often died a very lingering death; so that it was not an uncom-

mon thing for them to remain alive on the cross two or three days, till at last they perished by hunger, or were smothered by smoke, [for which purpose wet materials were burnt under the cross] or were devoured by wild beasts. Here the Jews proposed the breaking of their legs, as the means of hastening the death of the crucified. The breaking of the legs of slaves was not an unusual punishment among the Romans; which was done by laying the legs on an anvil, and breaking them in two with hammers. When this inhuman punishment was inflicted on the crucified malefactors, the wood of the cross to which their feet were nailed served instead of the anvil; and these violent and painful fractures soon brought on their death. By this cruel treatment, they hastened the death of these unhappy malefactors; but at the same time, their pain was increased to a very high degree by it. Such an excruciating torture the Jewish rulers, who probably had not yet been informed of Christ's death, would willingly have added to those, which had already been inflicted on the blessed Jesus through their means: For they besought Pilate that his bones might be broken on the cross, as well as those of the two malefactors.

But as these hypocrites had before prostituted their religion, by making it a cloak for their wickedness; so they likewise now alleged to Pilate, That the day of the preparation for that Sabbath which was one of their solemn festivals was at hand; and that it would be profaned, if the unclean bodies of the criminals should be suffered to hang on the cross on that high day.

How great was their accursed hypocrisy! They would not profane the Sabbath; and yet they had put to death the Lord of the Sabbath, (Luke vi. 5.) and profaned the sanctuary of Israel, as the Messiah is stiled by the prophet, (Isaiah viii. 14.) They would not have the sun set on the bodies of the executed criminals, because it was contrary to the law, (Deut.

xxi. 23.) and yet they suffer the sun to go down on their detestable wrath and inveterate malice against the blessed Jesus. This notorious instance of vile hypocrisy should awaken in us all an eternal abhorrence of that vice, which affects a great zeal for the externals of religion, but makes no account of the essential part of it.

Secondly, The indignity of mutilating the body of Jesus, which the Jews intended, was prevented by Divine providence. After Pilate had given orders that this request of the Jews should be complied with, two soldiers went up to the crosses, and, with iron bars or hammers, broke the legs of the two malefactors who were crucified with Jesus. Hence the penitent outwardly fared no better, than the impenitent thief. They both felt the cruel blows, and both expired in dreadful pangs and convulsions. To the soul of the penitent malefactor our blessed Lord had promised Paradise; but his body, which had been the instrument of his crimes, was to receive its deserts. He was crucified in the flesh; but his soul was preserved. Hence he probably distinguished himself from his abandoned fellow-sufferer by a composed patience, and rejoiced in his heart when he considered, that however painful this hastening of his death was, it would forward his passage into Paradise.

The soldiers, having now dispatched the two malefactors, approached the cross of Jesus, with an intent of putting an end to his life also, by breaking his legs. May we all draw near to the Lord Jesus with a better intention! Let us approach his cross with a broken and contrite heart, that we may rejoice in his salvation, and be upheld with his free Spirit, (Psalm li. 12.)

But the soldiers, observing that Jesus was already dead, which they might easily perceive by the change of his complexion, the cessation of all motion, and his head bowed down to his sacred bosom; 'They did not, saith St. John, break His legs.' Now as the intent of this additional punishment was to put an end

to the criminal's life; when they found that Jesus was already dead, there was no occasion for expediting his death by breaking the legs; thus, by omitting it, they acted agreeably to their orders.

But in this transaction, we must above all things have an eye to the hand of God, by which the hands of these soldiers were withheld from committing such an outrage on his Son's body. God would not suffer our Saviour's legs to be broken, for the following reasons:

First, That it might be manifest, that the sufferings and death of our Redeemer did not proceed from the will and insolence of his enemies; but that he himself had power voluntarily to lay down his life, before any one took it from him, (John x. 18.)

Secondly, That it might appear, that the blessed Jesus, though he was numbered among the transgressors or malefactors, was not of that class. Therefore his heavenly Father caused him to be distinguished from the two malefactors, after his death; since his bones were not broken, and he was honourably buried, neither of which was the case of those who were crucified with him.

Thirdly, That the scripture might be fulfilled, which, as cited by the Evangelist, says, 'A bone of him shall not be broken.'

These words refer,

1. To the type of the Paschal Lamb; concerning which it is said in scripture, (Exod. xii. 46.) 'Thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad, out of the house, neither shall ye break a bone thereof.' From this intimation of the Holy Spirit, here quoted by St. John, it is plain, that the chief view of that Divine ordinance was to prefigure this circumstance of our Saviour's passion, as it was a type of his great sacrifice.

2. We are hereby referred to a passage in the Psalms, (Psalm xxxiv. 19, 20.) where it is said of a particular righteous servant of the Lord, 'That many

are his afflictions; that the Lord delivereth him out of them all; and lastly, that he will keep all his bones, so that not one of them is broken;' and preservation was to be a pledge of his approaching resurrection. These words cannot be applicable to every righteous and pious man; for many godly persons have experienced the contrary. But if we interpret the words as a prophecy concerning Christ, which the context will very well bear, we may here see the literal accomplishment of them. The following words in the twenty-first verse of this Psalm are likewise applicable to our Saviour's enemies: 'Evil shall slay the wicked, [Jews] and they that hate the righteous [Jesus] shall be desolate; they who called out, his blood be upon us, &c. shall be punished with ruin and desolation. Let us hence deduce the following truths:

1. He who once gives himself up a servant to sin, will be continually incited by it to commit greater sins.

The enemies of the blessed Jesus were not satisfied with seeing him fastened to the cross; they would not rest till he was actually dead. Their inhuman cruelty was not satisfied though his flesh had been bruised and torn by the scourges and blows; but they solicited the governor, that his bones also might be fractured, the better to compass what they ardently wished, namely, that he should lie down, and rise up no more, (Psalm xl. 8.) Thus they could not restrain their impotent rage against the innocent, though the sun had, as it were, hid his face at the sight of their past wickedness, and the earth had shook and trembled under their feet. Thus, a man is deprived of all his freedom by sin if he suffers it to get the dominion over him; and he becomes a slave of the devil, and a blood-thirsty beast of prey, so that every spark of humanity is gradually extinguished in him. Let us therefore resolutely oppose the first beginnings of sin, and tread under foot the least spark of it that appears, lest it should break out into a flame to the destruction of body and soul.

2. Whoever judges of a man's spiritual state from outward appearances will be frequently mistaken.

The converted malefactor, as we have already observed, suffered the same painful cruelty as his impenitent companion; and yet there was a very great difference between those two persons. For one of them was a friend of Christ, the other his enemy and reviler; one was transplanted from the cross into Paradise, the other was cast into an abyss of misery.—Thus it may frequently happen, that two persons may be involved in the same misfortune, between whose inward spiritual circumstances there is a great disparity. One may be a faithful servant of God, the other the infamous slave of satan. Saul and Jonathan fell both in the same battle; and yet the difference between them was very great. The pious Josiah and the idolatrous Ahab were both killed in battle by an arrow, (Chron. xviii. 33. xxxv. 23.) That wicked prince Zedekiah, and the prophet Daniel, were both carried away captives into Babylon, (Jer. lii. 11. Dan. i. 2, 6.) but who thinks their merits equal? As this consideration should restrain us from forming precipitate judgments, and induce us not to think unfavourably of those who are involved in difficulties and distress, and labour under poverty, sickness, &c. it may likewise serve to comfort us when we are involved in sufferings, together with the most impious malefactors. For the Lord knows his own who have departed from evil; and a day will come when the difference between the righteous and unrighteous will be made manifest before the eyes of angels and all the human race. In the mean time, it is our duty by our calmness, patience, and resignation, so to distinguish ourselves from the children of this world, that others may see that a different spirit dwells in us from that which worketh in the children of unbelief.

3. God by a timely death often delivers his children from some great calamity intended them.

The Lord Jesus by his death, in which he freely laid down his life, prevented the cruelty of the soldiers, who designed to torture him by breaking his legs. Thus God still frequently brings his children into safety by an early death, before the floods of his judgments break in, and spread a general desolation over their country; or before the wicked can execute the impious schemes they had planned against them.

However the infinite wisdom of God is pleased to dispose of us, we must rest satisfied with his dispensations. If the Lord of life and death is pleased, by a sudden disolution, to remove us from some impending misfortune, it is to deliver us from evil; and were we to suffer the calamity, we have cause thankfully to acknowledge, that not a hair shall fall from our heads without his knowledge and permission.

II. But, instead of the intended insult of breaking the legs of Jesus, God permitted another indignity to be offered his sacred body; and the account of this insult is the subject of the remaining verses of the text, (John xix. 34, 35, 36.) which contain the following particulars.

First, The person who did this injury to our Saviour's body, and he is here mentioned. This was one of the soldiers, namely, one of those who had broke the legs of the two malefactors. This man, contrary to the respect he owed to his officer, (who had given a public testimony of Christ's innocence) had the presumption to offer this indignity to the blessed Jesus, after his death. Possibly, his design by this brutal insult to the dead body was to please the Jews; who perhaps had bribed him to do it, or at least, would not fail to reward him for his insolence.

Secondly, The indignity offered to our Saviour's body, which was this: A soldier with a spear stabbed it in the breast or side. This was done, indeed, out of wantonness or insolence; or, perhaps, the soldier might at the same time have an intention of trying, whether Jesus was really dead, or only in a swoon.

He therefore stabs him with a spear near the heart, that he might see whether he had still any life in him; so that by giving him a wound, he designed to dispatch him, in case any life remained in him. That it was no small wound which the spear made in the breast of our blessed Lord, but a large incision, appears from what he says to the incredulous Thomas, after his resurrection, 'Reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side,' (John xx. 27.)

Thirdly, What followed this injurious piercing of our Saviour's side is likewise mentioned by St. John, in these words: 'And forthwith came there out blood and water.' This was undoubtedly an extraordinary event; since the providence of God directed the soldier's spear to make an incision in the place where these different humours were lodged, and, at the same time, hindred these two fluids from intermixing; for St. John, who stood by, could plainly distinguish both blood and water issuing from the wound.

Fourthly, Mention is made of the certainty of this remarkable incident, in these words: 'And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.'—The certainty of this extraordinary phenomenon is confirmed,

1. As it is related by one who had it not by hear-say, but saw it with his own eyes.

2. As St. John is a credible witness; who was admitted by Christ among his Apostles, that he might bear a true testimony of the actions and occurrences of his life, death, and resurrection.

3. As his record was delivered after deliberate and mature thought, with the assisting light of the Holy Spirit, and with a Divine assurance; therefore it is added 'and he knoweth that he saith true.' But St. John here likewise mentions the end, for which he bare record in these words: 'that ye might believe;' namely, that our Saviour's side was thus pierced, and consequently that he did really die on the cross. The

beloved disciple, with his own eyes, saw blood and water issue from his Lord's pierced side, which affecting sight must have made his heart likewise bleed within him. This faithful witness relates it to us, that we may also believe. Therefore, 'Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed.'

Fifthly and lastly, The Evangelist mentions the counsel of God concerning this matter: 'These things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled.'—Hereupon St. John quotes the prophecy in which it is said; 'They [the Jews] will one day, look on him, whom [by the Roman soldier's spear] they pierced,' (Zech. xii. 10.) Hence it appears, that this incident had been predicted in scripture; and consequently that it did not happen fortuitously, and from the mere insolence of a licentious soldier, but that the counsel of God was likewise concerned in the accomplishment of it.

But the principle view of Providence in ordering this event, and causing it to be foretold by the Prophet, seems to be this; namely, that the certainty of Christ's death might be confirmed and ratified by it. Some may perhaps say, is it of such very great importance for us to know that Jesus Christ really died on the cross? to which it may be answered that it greatly concerns us. For if Christ be not really dead, the power of death is not really destroyed; since this was to be effected by the Mediator's death. If he did not die in reality, so neither is he risen in reality. But if his resurrection be merely a delusion, St. Paul's inference is, 'that our faith is vain and we are yet in our sins,' (1 Cor. xv. 17.)

But if it be asked, what was the purpose of God in ordering, that our blessed Saviour's side discharged both blood and water? In answering this question, it must be pre-supposed that blood and water represented the two principal benefits which Christ has acquired for us. The blood represents the benefit of atonement, which is applied to us in justification. For

in him we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins,' (Col. i. 14.) The water represents the benefit of sanctification and cleansing from sin, of which Jesus Christ has laid the foundation, by obtaining and sending on his disciples the Holy Ghost, which is often represented in scripture under the figure of water, as softening, cleansing, and fertilizing the heart. Hence the Messiah says by the mouth of the Prophet, (Ezekiel xxxvi. 25, 26, 27.) 'Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.'

In order to enter deeper into the consideration of this mystery, we must,

First, Take a view of the condition to which we are reduced by the fall. By the transgression of our first parents, we are sunk into a two-fold evil, both of which are very deplorable. For, by the transgression of the Divine command, we have brought on ourselves a heavy guilt; and by reason of our disobedience are obnoxious to the sentence of death which God passed on our first parents, and the punishment contained in this threatening, 'Thou shalt surely die.' We have likewise sustained a great loss by forfeiting the glorious image of God; so that our whole nature is defiled by sin. In order to recover this Divine similitude which we had lost, we must apply to another to deliver us from the guilt and punishment, and to repair that immense loss and damage we had sustained by the fall. Now this has been done by Jesus Christ the Son of God. He is come in his mediatorial office with BLOOD, without which there can be no forgiveness of sins, (Heb. ix. 22.) Therefore he shed his blood, and with it, at the same time, poured out his soul to death; and by his death our debt is blotted out,

God's justice is satisfied, remission of sins is obtained, and thus one evil is removed. But he also came with WATER, *i. e.* with the Holy Ghost, by which the defilements of our nature are done away, its impurity effaced, good resolutions imparted, the loss of the Divine image restored, and by this means the second evil is removed; and this is the key for understanding those words of St. John: 'This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ, not by water only, but by water and blood,' (1 John v. 6.)

Secondly, We are likewise in this mystery to turn our thoughts to the design of the whole Levitical economy, in which these two benefits acquired by Christ are adumbrated by many types. There were particularly two things expressive of the future benefits conferred in the New Covenant.

1. Water, with which those who were under any bodily pollution were to wash and cleanse themselves from their legal impurities.

2. The blood of the animal that was slain as a sacrifice, which was shed in great quantities under the Mosaic dispensation. Both these means were used sometimes separately, sometimes together, (Lev. xiv. 2—8. Heb. ix. 19.) Blood was the means of atonement, and represented the atoning power of Christ's blood, the true sacrifice for the sins of the world, (Heb. ix. 13, 14. x. 4.) Water was the means of purification, and prefigured the true purifying of the heart by the spirit of Christ, (Heb. x. 22.) The priests by the Levitical law were, at their consecration, cleansed with water and blood, (Lev. viii. 6, 22, 23.) But the real High Priest of the New Covenant, who is holy and without sin, stands in no need of being first purified and cleansed with water and blood of atonement; he having himself acquired those benefits for us. In this he has not like the Levitical priests, made use of blood of victims and water from without; but he is come with blood and water issuing from his own body, and thus by himself has cleansed us from our sins, (Heb. i. 2. ix. 12.)

3. This circumstance should likewise direct our thoughts to the two sacraments of the New Covenant, which are manifest and powerful memorials of these two benefits procured for us by Jesus Christ; by means of which the treasure of the death and merits of our Saviour are appropriated to us. For the water, which flowed out of his side, alludes to the laver of baptism, in which by water and the Holy Ghost we are cleansed from all our sins and impurities, (Acts xxii. 16.) But the blood which issued from his side alludes to the sacrament of the Lord's supper, which represents the blood of Jesus Christ that was shed for the forgiveness of our sins, (Matt. xxvi. 28.) O the depth of the wisdom and adorable mystery of the counsel of God in this event, which was apparently so inconsiderable! We shall now conclude with the following observations.

1. Jesus Christ, by this insult committed on his breathless body, intended to sanctify all the insults and indignities done to his martyrs and confessors after their death.

Whoever will look back a little to the history of the martyrs, will find that the persecutors of the Christians (so insatiable was their rancour) frequently treated in an approbrious manner the bodies of the saints, after they had been cruelly tortured to death. The most usual indignities were as follows: Their bodies were exposed naked and without burial, and at the same time the persecutors prohibited the Christians to fetch them away, and deposit them in the earth. Sometimes they threw the bodies of deceased martyrs into the water, and sometimes into the fire; others were thrown to be devoured by dogs and birds of prey, to wild beasts, &c. But all these indignities done to the bodies of Christians are sanctified, by Christ's suffering his sacred body to be wounded by a profane hand, after his death.

2. As our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has suffered a fountain for sin and uncleanness to be opened

for us in his body on the cross, we should diligently make use of it in order to obtain eternal salvation.

By this blood and water which flowed out of our Saviour's side, is obtained what all the Levitical purifications and sprinklings with blood and water typified, indeed, but could not in reality perform. Let us then with joy draw water out of this well of salvation, (Isaiah xii. 3.) Let us approach this free and open fountain with an heart convinced, both of the dreadful guilt of sin, and of the infinite loss we sustained thereby; that we may find forgiveness of the guilt of sin in the blood of Jesus Christ, and be washed from the uncleanness of sin in this pure water. Let us attentively consider St. Paul's exhortation to the Hebrews: 'Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled, [with the blood of atonement of the New Covenant] from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water, (Heb. x. 19. 22. Heb. ix. 14. 1 Peter i. 1, 2.)

THE PRAYER.

O FAITHFUL Saviour, we praise thee for all the tokens of thy love, and for all the several kinds of insults and indignities which thou wast pleased to endure for our sake, both before and after thy death.—Grant that we may hasten to the streams of blood and water which flowed out of thy side, and obtain remission of sins by a worthy participation of the sacraments, which they represented. Amen.

CONSIDERATION XII.

THE BLOOD OF THE SACRIFICE OF ATONEMENT, A TYPE OF THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST.

'THE life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it unto you upon the altar, to make an atone-

ment for your soul: For it is the blood, that maketh an atonement for the soul,' (Lev. xvii. 11.)

In the last Consideration, we gave some short introductory hints towards explaining the mystery concealed under the blood and water, which issued from our Saviour's side after his death. But this it a matter of such importance, that it may well deserve a farther discussion. For this end, let us go into the typical school of the Holy Ghost, and endeavour to illustrate the two most remarkable types of this mysterious stream of blood and water; namely, the blood of the sacrifices prescribed in the Old Testament, and the water gushing out of the rock, that was struck by Moses.

In our enquiry into the mystery concealed under the blood of the sacrifice, these two articles offer themselves to our consideration.

First, The blood of the sacrifice itself.

Secondly, The ceremonies observed about it.

As to the blood of those clean animals which were appointed for sacrifices, it was the chief article in the whole Levitical worship. When a person by a transgression of the Divine law had deserved death, he brought, in the stead of himself, such a victim as God had nominated; laid his hand on it, and confessed his crime over it. From that instant, the victim was considered as if itself had committed the crime, and thus deserved death; but the atonement for such a sin was not made till all the blood of the animal was drained off, and poured out at the foot of the altar. Hence St. Paul says, (Heb. ix. 22.) 'that without shedding of blood there is no remission.' Now if we consider how many millions of victims were thus sacrificed, from the time of Moses to that of our Saviour, first in the court of the tabernacle, and afterwards in the temple of Jerusalem; the immense quantity of blood, shed in all those sacrifices, must fill us with horror and amazement.*

* Josephus in his history of the Jewish wars, affirms that 255,600 paschal lambs were killed in the Temple at Jerusalem

The blood of the sacrifices so profusely shed was, under the Old Testament, according very sacred. No person, under pain of death, was to apply this blood to his own private use; God having reserved it for himself alone, and strictly enjoined that it should be poured out at his altar. Nay, in order to impress the greater awe and veneration for this blood of the sacrifices, it was likewise prohibited by the Levitical law, to eat the blood of any creature that was killed for common use, as appears by the following precept of God in Leviticus, (Chap. xvii. 10.) 'Whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood, I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among this people.' This injunction is likewise repeated in another place: 'Thou mayest kill and eat flesh in all thy gates, whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God, which he hath given thee; the unclean and the clean may eat thereof, as of the roe-buck and as of the hart. Only ye shall not eat the blood; ye shall pour it on the earth as water, (Duet. xii. 15. 16.)

Commentators have produced many reasons, why the eating of blood was so strictly forbidden under the Old Covenant. Some are of opinion that it was prohibited because the eating of blood is pernicious to the human body. It is the opinion of others, that God in his wisdom forbade it, in order to restrain men from all bloody and cruel dispositions. Others assign other reasons for this prohibition, but equally unsatisfactory. But God himself, who can best explain his own laws, has made known to us another cause, very different from any of those mentioned above. For after prohibiting the eating of blood, the Law-

in one day, at the feast of the Passover. Their blood, according to *Lundius's* computation, must have amounted to 1,000 hogsheads.

giver adds in the following verses, 'For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make an atonement for your soul; for it is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul. Therefore, I said unto the children of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourneth among you eat blood,' (Lev. xvii. 11, 12.)

It is here asserted that the life of the flesh is in the blood. For while the blood circulates in the bodies of brutes, they live; but if the blood be let out of their bodies, they remain without motion, and their animal life is at an end. As often therefore as the blood of a sacrificed animal was shed, it was looked on by God as if the soul of the victim was offered up to his justice; and this soul of the animal was farther considered as a ransom for the rational soul of the sinner.

The case was this: When any one by transgressing the ceremonial law of God had deserved death, his soul might justly have been violently forced from his body, and brought before the tribunal of the Supreme Law-giver, there, according to the rule of Divine justice to receive the sentence it had deserved, which was this, 'The soul that sinneth shall die.' But God, in the ceremonial law, was pleased to permit the sinner to redeem his soul by the soul of a beast; or, that for his own soul he should offer the soul of a victim. Now the soul of an irrational animal is by no means an equivalent ransom for the rational soul of a man; there being a very great disproportion betwixt them. However, this soul of the beast, which was poured out with its blood at the foot of the altar, was accepted by the Divine justice, as a pledge for the soul and blood of Jesus Christ, which were in due time to be shed for the sins of the whole world, and to be offered up to the Divine justice. Now as the blood of the sacrifice, or the animal soul of the sacrificed victim was accepted instead of the soul of the transgressor; so the Mediator's soul, which was separated from his body by a bloody and violent death, was accepted at

the Divine tribunal, as the ransom for the souls of many sinners who had deserved death, and as a sin-offering to atone for their transgressions, (Isaiah liii. 10.) When this was accomplished, and Christ had by a bloody death laid down his soul as a sin-offering; the type of the sacrificed blood was fulfilled, and the prohibition of eating blood no longer continued in force: And it was then universally proclaimed, that God, in consideration of the blood of Jesus Christ his beloved Son, which had been typified by copious streams of blood shed in the Levitical sacrifices, would remit men their sins, and acquit them from punishment, if they repent and believe in Christ.

Let us now, from the type, pass to the great Antitype. The blood of Christ is in scripture represented as the cause of our justification, sanctification, and glorification. I shall only mention the principal passages relating to this subject, which are as follows.

'This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many [for the infinite multitude of Adam's descendants] for the remission of sins, (Matt. xxvi. 28.) My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed; he that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him, (John vi. 55, 56.) Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, (Rom. iii. 25.) Much more then, being justified through his blood, we shall be saved from wrath, through him, (Rom. v. 9.) In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, (Eph. i. 7.) But now in Christ Jesus, ye, who sometimes were afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ, (Eph. ii. 13.) Having made peace through the blood of his cross, (Col. i. 20.) For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your consciences from dead works to serve the living God, (Heb. ix. 13. 14.)

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he has consecrated for us through the vail, that is to say, his flesh. (Heb. x. 19.) Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, (1 Peter i. 18, 19.) The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sins, (1 John i. 7.) He hath loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, (Rev. i. 5.) These are they who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb, (Rev. vii. 11.) They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony,' (Rev. xii. 11.) Thus the blood of Jesus Christ, and its powerful influence, is set forth unto us in the New Testament.

But in order rightly to understand all these passages of scripture, it is to be observed, that under the name of blood, the Holy Ghost usually comprehends both the entire obedience, and the sacrifice of our blessed Saviour. Hence St. Paul, (Heb. ix. 23.) uses the word blood and sacrifices as synonymous terms: 'It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with blood, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.' This sacrifice, which Christ offered to his Father for our reconciliation, includes likewise the prayers and supplications, the strong cries and tears, which he offered up in the days of his flesh, (Heb. v. 7.) all the reproaches, the insults, and contradiction of sinners; all the pains and agonies of his body and soul; and lastly, his death on the cross, in which they terminated. The Apostle in the epistle to the Hebrews, says of the blood of Christ, 'Ye are come to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel,' (Heb. xii. 24.) It speaks,

1. To God, and cries to him, not as the blood of Abel did, for vengeance on those who shed it, or caused it to be shed; but for atonement, reconciliation, and mercy on the human race, which was sunk into extreme misery. As often as his heavenly Father thinks on this blood, he must also think on the astonishing obedience of his Son, who shed it on the cross; on the outrages, and all the tortures which he endured; and consequently is thereby powerfully moved to pour down upon us pardon, forgiveness, and blessings.

2. The blood of Christ speaks likewise to men.—It speaks to secure and bold sinners, who go on in their impenitence and profligacy; and represents to them the inestimable value of their immortal souls, which can be redeemed from destruction only by the precious blood of the Son of God. It represents to them the abomination of sin, which defiles human nature with such spots, as can only be washed away by the blood of the Son of God. It represents to them the holiness and justice of God, which, for an atonement, has required such a ransom.

Farther, it speaks to penitent sinners who know their misery and depravity, and are deeply humbled for their sins. It represents to them the inconceivable love of God, which moved him to give up to so bloody a death his only Son. It promises them the remission of all their sins; informing their conscience, that the wrath of God is appeased, his justice satisfied, and his mercy ready to receive into his bosom, and impart grace to every soul that is sprinkled with the blood of Christ.

Blessed is he, who with faith and obedience hears the voice of this blood, speaking peace to his conscience. Though the blood of Christ implores mercy for us, and speaks better things than the blood of Abel; nevertheless, on those who, instead of being moved by it to faith and repentance, tread it under foot, and account the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, (Heb. x. 29.) it will one day still more loudly cry out for vengeance.

II. We now proceed to consider the ceremonies observed, with regard to the blood of the sacrifices, in the Old Testament; and these are chiefly the following:

1. The shedding of the blood. This was done by slaying the victim that was to be offered; its throat being cut with a sacrificing knife, so that the blood was all drained out of the animal's body, (Lev. i. 5.)

2. The receiving the blood. As the blood of the victim was shed, so was it received into a vessel, which one of the priests held for that purpose.

3. The sprinkling of the blood. In some sacrifices, the blood was sprinkled on the horns or corners of the brazen altar, (Lev. iii. 2, 13.) In others, it was sprinkled on the horns of the golden altar of incense, in the sanctuary, (Lev. iv. 7, 18.) Sometimes it was sprinkled against the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies, (Lev. xvi. 14, 15.) In other cases, even the book of the law, and the people, and the consecrated vessels of the tabernacle, were sprinkled with blood, (Heb. ix. 19, 21.)

4. The pouring out of the blood at the foot of the altar, (Lev. iv. 7.) Now there were in the temple certain conduits, by which the blood was carried off into the brook Cedron.

5. The carrying of the blood into the Holy of Holies. This was done only once a year, on the great day of atonement.

Let us, in the next place, with a holy reverence, consider the mysteries, which the wisdom of God has caused to be typified by these ceremonies. For none of them were arbitrary, or without a meaning; but the Supreme Wisdom, by which the whole Levitical service was instituted, had its secret views in these bloody sacrifices, to which they were all directed. For as the sacrifice of the blood, in general, typified the blood of Jesus Christ; so the ceremonies which accompanied the sacrifices, likewise prefigured the circumstances that attended the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

1. The shedding of the blood of the victim, that was sacrificed, represented the shedding of the precious blood of Christ, of which our blessed Saviour says, (Matt. xxvi. 28.) 'This is my blood, which was shed for many, for the remission of sins.' Now, the blood of Jesus Christ was very copiously shed in his sufferings. It was shed in great drops during his agony in the garden on the Mount of Olives, whither he went across the brook Cedron, into which the blood of the sacrifice was conveyed from the temple. It was shed when he was cruelly scourged. It was shed when he was crowned with thorns. It was shed at his crucifixion, when the nails were driven through both his hands and feet. Lastly, it was shed by piercing his side with a spear, even after his death. The remaining part of the blood which in death had collected itself about the heart, from all the veins, had a free passage totally to run out. Thus was the blood of our Redeemer abundantly shed for us.

2. The receiving the blood of the victim in a particular vessel, which was held under by one of the priests, indicates in general the reverence and holiness which ought to be observed towards the blood of Jesus Christ, and the sacrifice offered. The Apostle, in the epistle to the Hebrews, (chap. x. 29.) speaks of some who accounted the blood of the Covenant an unholy thing, and as it were, trod under foot the Son of God. But he intimates, that the punishment of such profane persons will be very grievous at the last day.

3. The sprinkling of the blood. Of this ceremony the Jews make great account, and call it the root of the sacrifice; however it prefigured many mysteries of the New Testament.

4. The pouring forth the blood of the sacrifice at the foot of the altar, represents, with regard to Christ, the abundant shedding of his blood on the cross, till the absolute separation of his body and soul. For it is said of Christ, 'He hath poured out his soul unto

death,' (Isaiah liii. 12.) and consequently he poured out his blood with the utmost willingness, and overflowing zeal, for the honour of God, and the unspeakable good of mankind.

5. Lastly, the High Priest, by entering with the blood of the sacrifice into the Holy of Holies, shewed that Christ, after shedding his blood on the cross, would enter into the heavenly sanctuary, there to appear in the presence of God for us.

Let us now all, without delay, comply with the following exhortation of St. Paul, (Heb. x. 19.) 'Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the vail, that is to say, his flesh, and having an High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for he is faithful that has promised; and let us consider one another to provoke unto love, and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.'

Moreover, the blood of Jesus Christ has a particular use, in which it differs from the typifying blood of the victims in the Old Testament. No person, under pain of death, was to drink of the latter; but Christ says on the contrary, in the New Testament, 'Drink ye all of this, my blood, &c.' (Matt. xxvi. 27, 28.) Nay even death is threatened in the gospel to those, who will not partake of it: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you,' (John vi. 53.) On the other hand life is promised to those, who drink it with true faith: 'Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and

my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him,' (John vi. 54, 55, 56.) This eating of the flesh of Christ, and drinking his blood, is figuratively done in the holy sacrament of the Lord's supper, to which the Son of God undoubtedly here alludes.

THE PRAYER.

O THOU faithful and ever-living Saviour, we bless, we praise and extol thee for shedding thy precious blood on the cross, in our stead, and for pouring out thy soul unto death, in order to redeem us from death eternal. Grant that we may never forget this inestimable benefit; and be pleased incessantly to renew the thoughts of it in our souls. Thou, O my Saviour, by the shedding of thy blood on the cross, hast accomplished the whole work of redemption; so that there is no need that thou shouldest die again, and offer thyself a second time, since by one sacrifice of thyself, once offered, thou hast perfected all those who shall be sanctified. Give us grace, O blessed Jesus, to make a faithful application of thy sacrifice, and gratefully to commemorate it in the sacrament which thou hast instituted, until thy coming again. Amen.

CONSIDERATION XIII.

THE WATER WHICH FLOWED FROM THE ROCK, A TYPE OF THE WATER WHICH ISSUED FORTH FROM OUR SAVIOUR'S SIDE.

'AND the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of sin, after their journies, according to the commandments of the Lord, and pitched in Rephidim: And there was no water for the people to drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water, that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, why chide you with me? Wherefore do ye tempt the Lord? And

the people thirsted there for water, and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this, that thou hast brought us out of Egypt, to kill us, and our children, and our cattle, with thirst? And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, What shall I do unto this people? They be almost ready to stone me. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel: And thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go, behold, I will stand before thee, upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.' (Exod. xvii. 1—6.)

In these words we have an account of a surprising miracle which God wrought in the deserts of Arabia. The occasion of this wonderful display of the Divine power, was the want of water. For though the children of Israel had plenty of flesh and bread, to satisfy their hunger; the quails lying in heaps about their tents, and the manna falling every night on the earth; yet they were in extreme want of water. Thus God, in his wisdom, seldom gives men at once every thing they wish for; but permits them to feel the want of something, in order to keep them in continual discipline, and oblige them to look up to his all-dispensing hand. In this exigency, the Israelites returned to their impious mistrust of the Divine providence, even so as to break out in menacing murmurs, against Moses. Thus, the distress which now came upon them discovered the wickedness, that lay concealed in their obdurate hearts. At the waters of Marah, which were miraculously sweetened for their use, and at the twelve wells of Elim, they shewed no distrust, or want of faith. But no sooner were they again in want of water, but their unbelief manifested itself in wicked murmurs. Thus it is, to this very day. While men are surrounded with plenty and affluence, they abound in faith, and trust in God. But when God deprives them

of their riches, &c. and puts them to the test, how far they believe in him; then they are too apt to betray their want of belief. The children of Israel ought to have been contented and easy, notwithstanding this want of water; since they were assured, that it was not by any mistake of their leader, but by God's command, that they were come into this barren wilderness, in which there was no water: For it is said in the text, 'They journeyed according to the commandments of the Lord.' But this unthinking people did not look up unto God, nor attend to the motion of his hand, which had brought them into these streights; but in their impatience, they murmured and exclaimed against Moses, the glorious instrument that God was pleased to make use of to conduct them through the wilderness. They did not have recourse to their Almighty Creator, and pray to him for water, in their distress; but they went to Moses, and peremptorily insisted on his providing water for their use: 'Give us water, say they, that we may drink.' However, though these words proceeded from a very wicked disposition; yet may we borrow them from these thirsty Israelites, and, with a better frame of mind, apply them to Jesus Christ, saying, 'Give us water, that we may drink.' This our blessed Lord himself has permitted us to do. For it is not only to the Samaritan woman, but to every one of us, that Jesus says, 'If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water,' (John iv. 10, &c.)

Moses indeed briefly remonstrates to them, that their misbehaviour was very sinful, and says, 'Why chide you with me? Wherefore do ye tempt the Lord?' But he did not think it advisable to enter into a long expostulation with this infatuated multitude, who were already looking out for stones to assault him. He then addressed himself to God; and intreated him not to revenge and punish such murder-

ous intentions, but to give him direction and assistance in such a critical time. Now as Moses, in this instance, is a follower of God by his patience and long-suffering; so we ought to imitate Moses, and in the like circumstances to possess our souls in patience and gentleness.

God, by the intercession of his faithful servant Moses, is prevailed upon to work a miracle, to remove the people's distress; upon which their fury subsided. For this end, Moses is directed to go to a rock on Mount Horeb. The omnipotence of God could have raised a cloud from the sea, and after having driven it by the wind to the wilderness, have dissolved it in rain; or have caused a spring to gush out of the earth, with which the people might have quenched their thirst. But God was pleased to bring forth abundance of water, by cleaving a hard rock. Thus, he did not only give a more manifest proof of his omnipotence, in accomplishing his design by such improbable means; but likewise intended to make the Israelites ashamed of the hardness of their hearts, and at the same time by these circumstances, to shadow out some future event of a sublimer nature. Moses was to strike this rock with the same rod, with which he had performed his wonders in Egypt, and had divided the waters of the red sea. God reminds Moses of this circumstance, in the following words: 'Take in thine hand thy rod wherewith thou smotest the river;' so that by recollecting the former miracle, Moses's faith might be strengthened, and the unbelief of the people confounded.

Two sorts of spectators were present at the striking of this rock;

1. Christ himself, in the pillar of the cloud, who is supposed to say in the text, 'Behold, I will stand before thee there, upon the rock in Horeb,' *i. e.* I will manifest myself in my glory, over the rock that shall be struck. But Christ is by no means to be thought a mere spectator on this occasion. It was by his

power, that this miracle was to be performed. As he had before directed the flight of the quails to the wilderness, and caused them to come and fall down among the tents of the children of Israel; so now he, in a wonderful manner, directs the course of the water to this rock.

2. The other class of spectators were the elders of the people; who were appointed to be witnesses of this miracle. The bulk of the people, by their unbelief, had rendered themselves unworthy of seeing this operation of the Divine omnipotence.

In the presence of the above mentioned spectators, Moses struck the rock with his rod, and in an instant produced a copious stream of living water, as appears from several other passages of scripture, (Psalm lxxviii. 15, 16. cv. 41. cxiv. 8. Isaiah xlviii. 21.)

If we would search deeper into the mystery of this remarkable transaction; St. Paul, who is an unexceptionable authority as to the true intention of God, throws a great light upon it in these words: 'Our fathers did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them; and that rock was Christ,' (1 Cor. x. 4.) From these words we may learn two things,

First, That the rock which Moses struck had a spiritual import, and represented Christ.

Secondly, That the water, which flowed from the rock, had also a spiritual meaning; hence it is termed by the Apostle, a 'spiritual drink,' *i. e.* drink which typified something spiritual.

Our blessed Saviour, in several passages of the Old Testament, when described as a protector and deliverer of his people, is called a rock. Moses speaks thus of the Israelites: Jesurun waxed fat and kicked, and forsook God who made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation,' (Deut. xxxii 15.) or, as the original phrase imports, treated him like a fool, or an idiot.

A rock is hard, permanent, and immovable; and therefore a proper type to prefigure,

1. The eternity and immutability of Christ.

2. His invincible firmness and strength.

3. His being an asylum to some, and an offence to others.

Those, who in confidence of faith fly to him for refuge, find safety and protection. Thus anciently, in time of war, the people betook themselves to the highest rocks for safety against the attacks of the enemy. But they, who through unbelief dash themselves against this spiritual rock, do it to their own destruction. Hence Christ is stiled in scripture, 'a rock of offence and a stumbling stone,' (Rom. ix. 32, 33. 1 Peter ii. 8.) Thus we see, how very properly our blessed Saviour is in general compared to a rock.

But this rock, of which we are now treating, represents Christ only in one particular, namely, that when it was struck with Moses's rod, it sent forth water; and in this event we find a two-fold mystery.

First, The sufferings of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, The abundant gifts of the Holy Ghost, which our blessed Saviour has acquired for us by his sufferings.

The former is represented by striking the rock with the lawgiver's rod; and the second is typified by the plenty of water which this stroke produced. These two particulars we shall now enlarge upon; and observe the wonderful resemblance between the type and the great Antitype.

I. The following resemblances may be observed between the rock that was struck, and Christ under his sufferings.

1. The rock Horeb derived its name from its aridity; for it was a dry parched rock, which seems but ill adapted to be a copious spring of water, to quench the thirst of such a numerous people. Thus, it is said of our blessed Saviour in his state of abasement, 'He shall grow up as a tender plant and as a root out of a

dry ground,' (Isaiah liii. 2.) The Pharisees and rulers of the people, his enemies, were persons of wealth and distinction, and flourished like a green bay tree, (Psalm xxxvii. 35.) but of the Messiah it is said, 'When we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him,' (Isaiah liii. 2.) His mean appearance like a servant, his obscure parentage and other circumstances externally despicable, rendered him a rock of offence to his people, a stone which the builders rejected.

2. The rock out of which the water was to flow, was pointed out to Moses by God himself. In like manner Christ was appointed by his Father before the foundation of the world, to be the Saviour of mankind, and the spring of living waters.

3. The glory of the Lord manifested itself over the rock which was struck, in the pillar of the cloud: 'Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb.' Thus the visible human nature of Jesus, the rock of salvation, was personally united with the Divine glory, which dwelled within it much more essentially than it did anciently in the cloud. Nay, the Divine glory displayed itself in Christ even in the lowest state of his humiliation; for, notwithstanding all the indignities and insults that were offered him, some rays of the divinity beamed in the eyes of the Roman officer who stood at the cross, so that he cried out, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'

4. The rock, on which God thus manifested his glory, was struck by his direction; so Jesus Christ, the rock of salvation, was wounded by the permission, and according to the predeterminate counsel and will of God; who says by the prophet, 'Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts,' (Zech. xiii. 7.) The strokes which our spiritual rock suffered, are the inward and outward sufferings of Jesus Christ.

5. The rock of Horeb was struck at a time when all Israel rebelled against the Lord and his servant Moses;

and consequently little deserved so great a benefit.—Thus the rock of salvation was smitten by God, and made a spring of living water, when Israel committed the greatest of sins, by reviling and insulting the rock of their salvation.

6. The rock was struck in the presence of the elders of Israel, who were witnesses of the miracle. Thus the elders of the people, the scribes, and the rulers stood under the cross of Christ, and saw how this rock of our salvation was stricken and afflicted, (Matt. xxvii. 41. Luke xxiii. 35.)

II. We come, in the second place, to consider the water which came forth from the rock; on which we shall make the following observations:

First, This water typified the rich abundance of grace, procured for us by the sufferings of Christ.

Secondly, As the water did not come forth until after the rock had been struck, and the glory of God had manifested itself above it; so likewise the Holy Ghost was not poured forth in a visible manner, till the blessed Jesus had felt the curse of the law, satisfied the justice of God, terminated his sufferings in death, and was again raised and received into glory. Hence the Evangelist says, 'The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified,' (John vii. 38. 39.)

Thirdly, As the rock of Horeb did not yield only a few drops, but whole streams of water issued from it, which allayed the present thirst of the people, and afterwards ran in the dry places like a river, (Psalm cv. 41.) to serve the people in any future exigency; so the rock of our salvation, being smitten and wounded, is become a copious spring of living waters, so that this water of life is sufficient to satisfy all the whole Israel of God, in their pilgrimage through time into eternity.

Approach to this living water, ye who still quench your thirst in the impure streams of sinful lusts, and drink iniquity as a thirsty man does water. 'If any man thirst, saith our blessed Saviour, let him come to

me, and drink: but this he spake of the Spirit,' as the Evangelist informs us, (John vii. 37. 39.) These are the words of your benevolent Saviour, who ardently desires your salvation, Let them not therefore pass by your ears to no purpose. Behold, for your sake he has suffered himself to be smitten and wounded; and by his meritorious sufferings has acquired for you the spirit of grace, which in his gospel you are freely invited to receive.

Come unto him also, ye who pant after grace, as the hart panteth after the refreshing stream; and be not deterred from approaching him by the sense of your unworthiness. Who could be more unworthy to receive water from the rock, than the seditious Israelites in the desart? Yet, notwithstanding all their murmuring, the mercy of God opened to them a copious spring of water.

Lastly, Come to those waters which flow from the rock of salvation, ye who have already experienced their enlivening virtue. Draw cheerfully out of his inexhaustible fulness, and then you shall never thirst.

THE PRAYER.

O MY Saviour, whose merit is infinite, be pleased so to dispose our hearts, as to become partakers of the living waters of thy spirit. Create in us a loathing of the turbid waters of sinful pleasures, and kindle in us an ardent thirst after thy grace. May we drink abundantly of the salutary streams of thy comforts, that we may arrive to those blissful regions, where we shall never thirst any more. Amen.

CONSIDERATION XIV.

THE LAST HONOURS PAID TO THE BODY OF THE LORD JESUS.

'AND now, when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, came a rich man of Arimathea, a city of the Jews,

named Joseph; he was an honourable counsellor, and a good man and a just: The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them, who also was a disciple of Jesus, (but secretly, for fear of the Jews) and waited for the kingdom of God: He went in boldly unto Pilate, and besought him that he might take away the body of Jesus. And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead; and calling unto him the Centurion, he asked him, whether he had been any while dead? And when he knew it of the Centurion, he gave the body of Jesus to Joseph, and commanded it to be delivered to him. And Joseph bought fine linen. And there came also Nicodemus who at the first came unto Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight.—Then took they the body of Jesus, and wrapped it in the clean linen and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury,' (Matt. xxvii. 57—59. Mark xv. 42—46. Luke xxiii. 50—53. John xix. 38—40.)

In these words are described the last honours paid to the breathless corps of the Lord Jesus,

First, By taking it down from the cross.

Secondly, By preparing it for an honourable interment.

I. Concerning the taking down of our Lord's body from the cross, the evangelical history takes notice.

1. Of the time when it was done.

2. The instruments, which the providence of God made use of for that end.

1. The time is denoted in general by St. John in these words, 'After this,' *i. e.* after Christ was in reality dead on the cross, and his side had been pierced with a spear by one of the soldiers. But St. Mark specifies the time something more punctually, and observes, that 'it was in the evening,' *i. e.* according to the Jewish computation of the day, between the ninth and twelfth hour, or according to our method of reckoning the hours, between three and six of the

clock in the afternoon; when the sun drew near the time of its setting, and about two hours before night came on. It is further observed by the Evangelist, that it was the evening of the preparation, or the day before the Sabbath. Thus it was a vigil, or the even of a day which was kept holy on a double account.

First, As it immediately preceded the Sabbath; hence it is called, the day before the Sabbath.

Secondly, As it ushered in the feast of the passover, which fell out on that Sabbath; therefore it is also termed the day of rest, or the preparation for the passover. According to our method of computing the days of the week, it was the Friday on which the Jews prepared themselves for the ensuing Sabbath, which was likewise the day of the passover, the principal, and the most solemn festival observed by the Jews. About this time, the rest of the Jews were performing their hypocritical devotions in the temple. But instead of this, Joseph and Nicodemus were employed in paying the last honours to the breathless corps of our blessed Lord; and in this they acted agreeably to the words of Jesus, namely, that mercy is better than sacrifice. This eve of the Sabbath was a very proper time for the interment of the Lord Jesus; since the Son of God now rested from the work of redemption, which might be considered partly as the conclusion of the Sabbaths instituted in the Old Testament; and partly as a preparation for the great Sabbath of the New Testament, on which the people of God were to rest from the laborious service of the ceremonial law.

2. The instruments which the Divine providence was pleased to make use of on this occasion. These had been before made known by the prophet Isaiah, (Isaiah liii. 9.) who says, that the Messiah should, in his death, be with the rich, &c. But what little appearance was there of the accomplishment of this prophecy; since the most wealthy and principal persons of the Jewish nation, not only rebelled against

this King, whom God had determined to set up in Sion; but even condemned him to die. However, the eternal wisdom of God soon provided the means to fulfil this prophecy. God raised up two persons to perform this office, of whom it was little thought that they would take on themselves the care of the body of a crucified person. Thus, when in any instance we have the Divine promise before us, though we cannot see any one near us, who is likely to perform it, yet we must not despair of relief. The Lord will provide a proper instrument, and will fulfil all his promises. But the chief instrument God made use of on this occasion, is described,

First, By his name: which was Joseph. Thus, Joseph signalized his faith in honouring the corps of a person, who had died on the cross as despised and dejected of men, and had been sentenced to death as the vilest malefactor, with a decent interment. He is further described,

Secondly, By his country. As Joseph was a common name among the Jews, this person, by way of distinction, is stiled Joseph of Arimathea. This, according to St. Luke, was a town of Judea, and is placed by St. Jerome between Lydda and Joppa; but others will have it to be the town of Ramah, which was situated on a hill between Joppa and Jerusalem.

Thirdly, He is further described by his external circumstances. He was a rich man, and filled an honourable post either in the sanhedrim, or in the city council of Jerusalem, which consisted of three and twenty persons; hence he is stiled a counsellor. And thus was fulfilled what Isaiah had predicted in these words: 'And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death,' (Isaiah liii. 9.) The meaning of this verse in the original is properly this: "The grave of the Messiah had indeed been appointed among the wicked;" *i. e.* it had been agreed to bury him with contempt in some infamous place among the malefactors; "but he was found among the rich af-

ter his death." These rich men were Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus who afterwards joined himself to the former.

Fourthly, Joseph is described according to his inward qualities. Some of these were such, as he had in common with many other persons of rank in those days. Thus he is stiled by St. Mark an honourable man; but St. Luke observes that, among other good qualities, he had so far shewn his attachment to justice and equity, as to act according to the dictates of his conscience; so that he had not consented to the counsel and deed of our Saviour's enemies, (Luke xxii. 51.) Hence it is evident, that he either did not make his appearance when the whole council assembled to condemn Jesus; or, if he was present, that he did not join in the vote for his condemnation. And if, with some commentators, we suppose him to have been only a member of the city council; yet, he sufficiently expressed his disapprobation of the unjust proceedings of the great council against Jesus. Thus far he might have proceeded by his mere natural probity, and the impulse of his conscience, which is naturally shocked at flagrant acts of injustice and cruelty. But St. Luke, in terming Joseph 'a good man and a just,' seems to allude to a distinction which was common among the Jews, who divided mankind into three classes, namely, just men, good men, and sinners, (Rom. v. 6. 7.) The sinners were those who perpetually wronged, injured, and did violence to others, without doing good to any one. The just were those who, being content with what they had, never offered to molest or injure others. But none were stiled good men, but those only who communicated of their substance to the poor and necessitous. This last was Joseph's character. For he was not only just, injuring no one; but he was good, benevolent, and liberal to others. He was just, as he did not consent to our Saviour's death. He was a good and generous man; since he defrayed the charges of his burial, which were very considerable.

But the Evangelists have specified more sublime and excellent endowments of mind, which this extraordinary person was possessed of.

1. St. John says, that he was a disciple of Jesus, *i. e.* he accounted Jesus a teacher sent from God, and his doctrine to be true and just, and agreeable to the writings of Moses and the prophets. He was, consequently, not only a hearer of our blessed Lord, but an obedient and zealous observer of his doctrine. According to St. Matthew's account, he had so improved the knowledge which he had acquired of the doctrine of Christ, that he himself had made disciples or converts to Jesus; having, every where, in his conversation with others, introduced something which might afford matter of reflection, and cause them to entertain higher thoughts of the despised Jesus. However, as St. John observes, all this he had done privately, for fear of the Jews; and especially his colleagues, who had past a decree to excommunicate all those who should acknowledge Jesus to be the Messiah, (John ix. 22. xii. 42.) This fear of man was indeed a foible; but as he had a well disposed mind, and a sincere love to Christ, God, in this weak instrument, manifested a power which calls for our admiration. While the blessed Jesus was alive, and while he was esteemed, followed and admired, by multitudes, Joseph was a secret disciple, for fear of the Jews; whereas now, when our blessed Saviour was dead, and his cause was desperate, Joseph's fear vanishes, and he publicly shews himself a zealous disciple of Him, whom the Jewish rulers had crucified. Thus, his faith gave him the victory, and triumphed over the world and the fear of man. But,

2. St. Mark adds: 'He waited for the kingdom of God.' Thus, his mind must have been pretty free from the reigning prejudices of the Jews; for according to their notion, the kingdom of the Messiah was to be a worldly and temporal sovereignty. But Joseph waited for the kingdom of God, namely,

that spiritual kingdom which was to be founded by the Messiah, who himself had declared, that the kingdom of God was come, (Mark i. 15.) Therefore, Joseph was not offended at the sufferings and death of Christ, like those who were filled with chimerical notions of the conquests, pomp, and glory of the Messiah's earthly kingdom.

Fifthly, and lastly, He is described by the regard he shewed to the Lord Jesus. It is said in the evangelical history, 'He went in boldly unto Pilate.' His faith inspired him with courage; and though reason represented to him the many difficulties attending this affair, instead of being deterred by them, he resolved at all events, whatever judgment the public might pass on it, or whatever danger he might incur from the cruelty of our Saviour's enemies, to be wanting in no endeavours for procuring the body of Jesus. And though it could not but be disagreeable to a man of his probity and delicate conscience, to ask a favour of such an unjust and profligate judge; yet he repaired to his hall of judgment, in which the chief priests and elders, out of their pharisaical hypocrisy, would not set a foot, and desired leave of Pilate to take down the body of Jesus from the cross, in order to bury it; for this could not be done without a licence from the Roman governor, who was the supreme magistrate. But as Christ had been lifted up on the cross, by the sentence of the magistrate; so it was God's pleasure, that he should be taken down by the same means, namely, by a licence from the judge. Now Pilate, well knowing that crucified persons often lived two or three days on the cross, wondered to hear that Jesus was already dead; and even that he had expired before an end was put to his life, by breaking his legs. However, having sent for the Centurion who commanded the party of soldiers at the cross, and making a particular enquiry into the affair, he found by the officer that all these circumstances were true. Therefore, when he was assured that Jesus was really dead, he granted Joseph's request.

Who does not in this circumstance see the hand of God, which so wonderfully directed these incidents, that the Roman governor, by his enquiries, is made the instrument to confirm the certainty of our Saviour's death? Thus, as our blessed Lord, by reason of the enrollment and taxation, was entered in the register of the living under Augustus; so under the lieutenant of his successor Tiberius, in order to strengthen our faith concerning the reality of Christ's death, he was registered in the list of the dead. Avaricious governors had, indeed, a practice of selling their licence to bury executed malefactors, at a high rate. But Pilate gave Joseph the body of Jesus voluntarily, and without any present, which he might have expected from him, as he was a man of wealth and distinction. Upon this, as St. John relates it, 'Joseph came [and with the help of his servants] took the body of Jesus' from the cross. With what joy did Joseph receive the permission from Pilate, and how happy did he think himself in being possessed of the lifeless remains of a person he honoured so much while living! Here let us pause a while, and, before we proceed, make the following observations:

1. When it so happens, that a part of the public worship of God interferes with a necessary act of charity, and love to Christ and his members, which will admit of no delay, the former may be omitted, and the latter performed with a safe conscience.

Joseph had no reason to entertain any uneasy scruples, because his care for the interment of the Lord Jesus prevented him from assisting in the temple, at the worship which was preparatory to the approaching Sabbath. He was now to attend a labour of love which could not be deferred; and this was infinitely of higher value in the sight of God, than all the numerous sacrifices at that time offered in the temple. Therefore, it would have been an hypocritical show of devotion, had he, out of fear of omitting the temple service, been wanting in this opportunity

of shewing his love to Christ. Certainly, the public worship of God ought not to be omitted but on very important occasions, and in cases of urgent necessity. At all other times we are obliged to attend it, and by our devotion set a good example to others. But if, in the time of divine service, an occasion offers of being serviceable to a member of Jesus Christ, of attending on him in his sickness, assisting him under temptations, or helping him in any pressing exigency; or if the providence of God point out to us an occasion where our charity is immediately required; the public worship may, for that time, be omitted with a safe conscience. Such a high value does God place on the love of our neighbour, that he as it were postpones his own service, and gives the former the precedence.

2. External probity, and a natural love of justice, though not allowed to be sufficient to make a true Christian, are not at all superseded by the profession of christianity.

It is true, indeed, that the mere observance of justice and probity does not constitute a Christian. But this declaration is misconstrued by many sectaries and enthusiasts; who entertain an impious notion, that all external morality is exploded by the gospel, and that it is no part of the Christian religion to practice the social duties. But we here see, that the Holy Spirit inserts this elogium of Joseph, namely, 'that he was a good man and a just,' and consequently was possessed of every moral virtue. It were to be wished, that a natural love for justice was more frequently to be met with among persons in trust and power, who call themselves Christians; and then the complaints of injury and oppression would not be so common.*

* If those, who amongst us think themselves at the summit of Christian perfection, would condescend to practise and inculcate the heathen virtues and moral duties they exclaim against, it would be happier for themselves and their hearers. *W.*

God, even since the fall, has left man so much power as is necessary towards leading a social, just, and regular life; and every one is bound to make use of this natural capacity of being virtuous, according to the design of the all-wise Creator; which is, that we should be worthy and useful members of human society. However, morality alone is not sufficient in God's eye to make a man a true Christian, and an heir of the kingdom of Heaven, (Matt. v. 20.) Honesty and godliness are good and acceptable in the sight of God, (1 Tim. ii. 2.) and must go together. When the former is ennobled by the latter, and when we are powerfully restrained from all unworthy and dishonest practices through the fear of God, it is unquestionably one of the greatest ornaments of a Christian. Whereas probity, without the fear of God, is no more than a whited sepulchre, outwardly beautiful and spacious, but void of life and intrinsic worth within.

3. He, who is faithful in small things, will be entrusted with greater.

This gospel maxim we see here confirmed in Joseph of Arimathea. This man was faithful in his natural powers, which God endowed him with, in order to lead a virtuous life. He was faithful in obeying the dictates of his natural conscience, by condemning injustice, and refusing to join in condemning an innocent person to die. He was faithful in the improvement of the knowledge which he had of the truth of our Saviour's doctrine; secretly bringing others to follow Christ at a time, when he did not dare publicly to own himself one of his disciples. Behold, how richly he is here rewarded for that fidelity which he shewed in small things, and what a treasure of faith God bestows on him! For, he publicly goes to Pilate, overcomes the world, and its malicious censures, and shews himself a true disciple of the blessed Jesus when his affairs were seemingly in the most desparate situation, and when there appeared but little hopes that any of the Jewish rulers would even associate with him again.

Oh, that men would make a right use of their natural powers, and pay a greater regard and reverence to the voice of their consciences. Then God would lead them further, and, by his revealed word, would impart to them the enlivening principle of the spiritual life. For God does not leave the least fidelity of man unrewarded; but, out of his abundant grace, rewards it with a plentiful measure of Divine assistance. On the contrary, we must not think it strange that he, who does not make a right use of his natural reason, by which he might be enabled to live a quiet, temperate and virtuous life, should grow more abandoned and increase in his wickedness; since it is but a righteous judgment of God, that he, who abuses the gifts of Heaven and disregards the dictates of conscience, should plunge himself deeper and deeper into sin and infamy.

4. He, that will not risk something for the love he bears to Christ, will never make any great proficiency in the school of christianity.

It is here said of Joseph that he went in boldly to Pilate, and desired the body of Jesus. Something must be risked in religion, before we can attain to any degree of perfection. In the conflict of repentance, we must determine to renounce our dearest bosom sins, to give them a perpetual bill of divorce; and for Christ's sake, to risk our reputation in the world, and perhaps submit to mockery and insults from our former friends. We are to risk something in the good fight of faith by resolving to rely on the Divine promises and approach the throne of grace, notwithstanding our unworthiness, which would make it seem hazardous. We are to risk something in entering the combat of prayer, when satan places difficulties before us, by insinuating, that God will not hear sinners.

5. The pious, prudent, and resolute undertakings of a true Christian, however hazardous they may appear, will by the Divine assistance be brought to a happy issue.

What could seem more uncertain, and at the same time more dangerous, than this resolution of Joseph to ask for our blessed Saviour's body? Had he considered his own character, that of his colleagues, or the character and disposition of Pilate, a thousand apprehensions would have arose in his mind, and deterred him from the attempt. But as he regarded God only when he resolved on it, by the power of his love and faith towards the deceased Jesus, he overcome all difficulties. For as he followed the impulse of his conscience in this enterprise, and recommended the event to God, this hazardous event succeeded; and by it he acquired a jewel, far more prescious than any thing he had risked to obtain it. This example should encourage us to an imitation of it; and the happy issue of Joseph's pious, though difficult enterprize, should animate us boldly to venture something for the honour of God. What if affairs seem desperate, and every thing turns contrary to our expectations; yet we shall be no loser by the attempt. We shall have still the testimony of a good conscience, and the honour of having risked something for the sake of Christ; and in the day of retribution, our good will and generous attempts shall not go unrewarded.

6. As the taking down of the body of Jesus from the cross was not only permitted, but even appointed and predicted by God, it is a means for greatly strengthening our faith.

God had ordered, (Deut. xxi. 22, 23.) that a man who had been hanged as a curse on a tree, should be taken down and buried before sun-set. This was a sign to denote, that his justice was now satisfied by the punishment and disgrace inflicted on the delinquent; so that the land of Israel might from that time be accounted clean. This was a type of the burial of Christ. The great Surety of mankind had borne our sins in his body on the tree, and become a curse on it for us (Gal. iii. 13.) Now as his dead body was by God's own appointment taken down

from the cross, and afterwards honourably buried; it is an assured sign that the Divine justice is satisfied by our Saviour's death, and that the curse is abolished and done away. If our Redeemer had not paid all to the utmost farthing, justice would not have permitted him to be taken down from the cross. But as God permitted this, he gave a public testimony to all the world, that his justice was fully satisfied.—Hence all who believe in the crucified Jesus, and obey his precepts, are in the eye of God, exempt from the curse of the law, and free from all condemnation, (Rom. viii. 1.) This comfort is of inestimable value; but it is only so to the truly penitent and humble Christian.

II. After our Saviour's body was taken down from the cross, it was prepared for an honourable interment. We may learn from the evangelical history,

First, Who the persons were that performed this generous office. These were Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Joseph, with his servants, had before taken down the body of Jesus from the cross.—But while this pious man was employed in preparing it for interment, the providence of God sent him Nicodemus as a colleague, who was a person of equal distinction with himself. He not only bore his share in the charges, but likewise in the odium and contempt, and other inconveniencies, which Joseph might naturally expect on account of this labour of love. It is here observed of Nicodemus, that he formerly came to Jesus by night, and that it was for fear of the Jews. Hence it appears, that he was not free from the weakness which had possessed Joseph of Arimathea. But now he also shews an equal boldness; and the bands of fear in both of them are broken asunder, and shaken off by the death of Christ. As all nature publicly sympathised with the Lord Jesus; for the earth trembled and the rocks were rent, as it were to celebrate his obsequies; Nicodemus would not be wanting in showing his esteem and love to Christ; so that his

mind was stirred up to assist in performing the last office for our blessed Lord. The harmonised text informs us,

Secondly, That these two persons shared the labour and expence between them. We are told that 'Joseph bought fine linen, in order to wrap up the body of Jesus;' and that Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight, and costly spices. The linen was steeped in this aromatic mixture or ointment; and then the body of Jesus being first washed, was wrapped and wound in linen clothes. This preparation of the body of our blessed Saviour for interment had been prefigured in his life, (John xii. 7.) when a devout woman called Mary anointed him, as it were, for his burial. For on that occasion, our blessed Lord plainly intimated that a like honour would be paid him after his death. Thus he shewed himself a true prophet concerning his death and burial; and an honour was shewn him in the latter, which only the most wealthy among the Jews of that age could afford. The blessed Jesus was born poor, and died so; but he was rich in external ornaments twice during his abode on earth; once soon after his entrance into the world, whither he came poor, naked, and helpless, like the meanest of his brethren; and a second time immediately after his death, which was also accompanied with poverty, nakedness, and ignominy. Soon after our Saviour's birth, some great personages among the eastern gentiles presented him with gold, frankincense, and myrrh; and after his death, two persons of wealth and distinction among the Jews anointed him with the most costly aromatics and spices. Thus was the end of his continuance on earth attended with more splendor, than his first entrance upon it. At his birth, when he entered on his state of humiliation, he was wrapped up in mean swaddling clothes; but at his burial, when his state of abasement drew towards a period, he was wrapped up in fine linen dipped in the most costly oint-

ments. By this circumstance was literally fulfilled what is said of the Messiah in the forty-fifth Psalm, (verse 8.) 'Thy garments [namely thy grave clothes] smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia.' Let us now make the following observations on this subject:

1. We may here observe the gradual progress of the spiritual life in Nicodemus, which are particularly taken notice of in the gospel. He is first described coming by night to Christ, and represented as a child, (John iii. 2.) who was to learn the very first elements of our Saviour's doctrine. He is afterwards described as a disciple, opposing his wicked colleagues and saying to them, 'Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doth?' (John vii. 50, 51, 52.) in answer to which question he receives this reprimand, 'Art thou also of Galilee? search, and look; for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.' But here, at the death of Christ, he appears a spiritual man in his full growth and perfect vigour; who at a time when the cause of Jesus seemed desperate, publicly owns himself his disciple, and brings precious aromatics to prepare his body for the burial.

2. No expences are better bestowed than those employed on Christ and his members, either in cloathing them when naked, or bestowing on them such other comforts as they want.

O that the rich of this world would well consider this, and bestow some part of their superfluities in works of charity and beneficence! This would bring down a real blessing on them; for what is bestowed on his poor brethren, Christ accepts as if it was bestowed on himself. Nicodemus's expences in magnificent houses, gay equipage, &c. are lost and buried in oblivion. But the expences he was at in burying the Lord Jesus, the vast quantity of rich and costly spices which he contributed on that occasion, are entered in God's book of remembrance, and will be rewarded in the sight of angels and men at the great day of retribution. Let those rich men, who would

be thus happy, tread in his foot-steps; and what they have hitherto superfluously lavished away on vain ornaments, or on their pleasures, let them bestow on Christ's poor brethren, and they shall be openly commended and rewarded by the Son of God, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with myriads of angels.

3. By long conferring with flesh and blood, we neglect many happy opportunities of doing good to the members of Christ.

The devout women, who had followed the Lord Jesus from Galilee, also brought spices and ointments, (Luke xxiii. 56.) and came to anoint him on that morning when he rose from the dead. But they came too late: for our blessed Lord had already left his grave, and was risen. He who has a mind to do good, let him do it without delay. Good opportunities, like riches, have wings, and fly away before we are aware.

4. Lastly, The imperfections that usually attend our good works are covered by our love to the Lord Jesus, which flows from our faith in him.

It must be allowed, that there was a weakness attending the good offices of these worthy personages. This appears in their anointing the sacred body of the blessed Jesus, in order to preserve it from putrefaction; whereas it was written in the Psalms concerning the Messiah, 'Thou wilt not suffer thy HOLY ONE to see corruption,' (Psalm xvi. 10.) But this weakness is entirely overlooked on account of that cordial love to the Lord Jesus, from which it proceeded. The Spirit of God, instead of representing this foible of entertaining such an erroneous idea of Christ, as a crime, mentions it as the effect of their love and esteem for the deceased, and passes over their weakness.—Let us therefore pray to our faithful Saviour, that he will shed abroad his love in our hearts, and inflame us with a laudable emulation by the two noble examples, of which we have now been treating.

THE PRAYER.

O FAITHFUL Saviour, we thank thee that out of thy transcendent love to our souls, thou hast by thy death descended into such a helpless state, as to stand in need of the assistance of others: Praised be thy name for inclining the hearts of Joseph and Nicodemus to pay the last honours to thy breathless body, after thy painful ignominious death; by which thou hast prefigured that honour which was destined to our bodies, in being made temples of the Holy Spirit. We are assured that if, in following thee, we hold out to the end, even our pain and ignominy will be swallowed up in eternal bliss and glory. Give us a heart to love thee our crucified Saviour, and to rejoice at every opportunity of shewing our love to thee by relieving thy poor members. Grant this for the sake of thy love. Amen.

CONSIDERATION XV.

THE BURIAL OF THE LORD JESUS.

'NOW in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden; and in the garden a new supulchre, which Joseph had caused to be hewn out of a rock, wherein never man before was laid. Here laid they Jesus, therefore, because of the Jews preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand. And they rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. And the women also, who came with him from Galilee, followed after. Among these were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of Joses, who sat over against the sepulchre, and beheld how and where his body was laid. And they returned and prepared spices and ointments, and rested the Sabbath day, according to the commandment. Now the next day that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we re-

member that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore, that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day; least his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people, he is risen from the dead: So the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, ye have a watch; go your way, make it as sure as you can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, snd setting a watch,' (Matt. xxvii. 60—66. Mark, xv. 46, 47. Luke xxiii. 53—56. John xix. 41, 42.)

In these words we have an account of the interment of the Lord Jesus; in which are mentioned,

First, The sepulchre, in which the body of our Saviour was deposited.

Secondly, The burial, or interment.

Thirdly, The different behaviour of our Lord's friends and enemies on this occasion.

I. The sepulchre, in which our Saviour's body was deposited, offers the following particulars to our consideration.

First, The place where this sepulchre was:

'Now in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden.' This sepulchre therefore was in a garden contiguous to Mount Golgotha. The scripture makes particular mention of three gardens.

1. The garden of Eden, where sin and the curse due to it commenced, by our first parents' transgression of God's command.

2. The garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, which was the scene where the sufferings of Christ began, by which sin and the curse were to be abolished and done away.

3. This garden, in which, after our Saviour's sufferings, sin and the curse were, as it were, buried with him in his death.

It was not unusual amongst the Orientals to have their sepulchres in their gardens, an instance of which we have in the second book of Kings, (chap. xxi. 18.)

where it is said that king Manasseh was buried in the garden of his own house. But here, the wisdom of God had very particular reasons for appointing the sepulchre of the Redeemer of mankind to be in a garden; by which we were to be put in mind of the garden of Eden. In the latter our first parents, by their disobedience, caused great trouble to our Redeemer; in the former, he was to rest after the conclusion of his sufferings. In the garden of Eden, death acquired a despotic power over the whole human race; in this garden he was divested of his power over us, so that the church may triumphantly cry out, 'O death! where is thy sting?' In the former, the first Adam fell into a deep sleep, during which a wife was formed for him out of his side; in the latter, the second Adam was to repose, that the church, his spotless bride, might likewise derive its origin from him. So wisely has the providence of God directed this circumstance concerning our Saviour's burial.

Secondly, The owner of the sepulchre is mentioned by the Evangelists; and this was Joseph of Arimathea, who had requested Pilate that he might be permitted to take down our Saviour's body from the cross, as we have observed in the last Consideration. This person had been moved by the providence of God, to cause a sepulchre to be hewn out of a rock in his garden, which was near Mount Golgotha. Joseph never imagined that Jesus of Nazareth, whose disciple he was in secret, was to be laid in this sepulchre. But God, to whom all his works are known from the beginning, had this in view, when he inclined the heart of Joseph to make a sepulchre in this garden. It may then be said of Joseph, as Jesus said unto Peter on another occasion, 'What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter,' (John xxiii. 7.) Joseph's intent was to provide a place of burial for himself and family; but God had a more important design in view, and so directed contingencies, that Joseph here made a sepulchre for the Prince of Life.

Joseph probably was put in mind of death by this tomb, and meditated on his latter end in this garden. Let us also learn from Joseph, to meditate on our death and resurrection in our walks and gardens. They continually afford us ample subject for such meditations: for every fading flower reminds us of our mortality; and, on the other hand, every blade of grass that dies in winter, and shoots forth again in spring, is, as it were, a preacher of the resurrection.

Thirdly, The following particulars are mentioned concerning our blessed Saviour's sepulchre:

1. It belonged to another person. As our blessed Lord in his life time, had not a place where he might lay his head; so likewise, in death, he was not possessed of a grave.

2. It was a new sepulchre, in which never any man had been laid. This was a necessary precaution, lest the resurrection of Christ should be ascribed to a wrong cause. If it had been otherwise, his enemies might have ridiculed and depreciated this miracle, by saying, "Possibly some holy prophet had been buried in that sepulchre many centuries ago, and when this Jesus of Nazareth was laid on his bones, he was restored to life, as we have a similar instance in scripture," (2 Kings xiii. 21.) God intended to obviate, by this circumstance, such a subterfuge of unbelief.

3. We are further informed, that this sepulchre was hewn in a rock. This circumstance was likewise directed by the hand of Providence. For had it been in a loose soil, unbelievers, with their usual cavils, might have pretended, that the disciples of Jesus had made a subterraneous passage, and carried off the body, without breaking the seal, &c. by which the outside of it was secured. But the wise providence of God, in this circumstance obviated all such cavils against the certainty of our Saviour's resurrection.

Fourthly and lastly, The reason is mentioned why this sepulchre was chosen in preference to any other, in these words: 'Here laid they Jesus, therefore, be-

cause it was the Jews preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.' Indeed, these pious persons, who thus took care of our Saviour's burial, had but little time left. It was within an hour or two of sunset, when the Jewish Sabbath began, for which some previous preparation was also required. Now as time did not permit them to carry the body of Jesus to any place at a greater distance from Golgotha, there was a necessity of making choice of the nearest sepulchre at hand. But God had before taken care to provide a tomb for his Son in Joseph's garden, which was contiguous to Mount Golgotha. This circumstance likewise signified, that the place where Jesus Christ suffered the greatest ignominy was contiguous to that, which was to be the first theatre of his glory.

II. The interment of our blessed Lord is briefly related by the Evangelist, in these words: 'There laid they Jesus.' The wealthy Jews were not buried in the manner usual among us, by putting the corpse into a coffin, letting it down into the ground, and covering it with earth; but every family of distinction had a kind of vault, consisting of long, narrow cavities cut in a rock. In one of these cavities or niches, which served for a sarcophagus or tomb, the corpse, which was wrapped or wound in linen grave-clothes, was put. In this manner the body of the Lord Jesus was laid in one of the cavities of Joseph's new sepulchre. The hatred of his enemies intended him another kind of burial. According to the custom of the Jews, he would, as a crucified person, have been thrown into a pit on Mount Golgotha, among the bodies of the most infamous malefactors, and a little earth sprinkled over him. But his state of abasement being now finished, every thing was to tend to his glorification. For the honourable burial of Christ was a kind of intermediate space between his state of abasement, and his exaltation; and therefore it was accompanied, as it were, with the dawn of his approaching glory.

III. Let us, in the last place, take a view of the different behaviour of the friends and enemies of our blessed Lord on this occasion.

First, Let us consider the behaviour of his friends. These were,

1. Joseph and Nicodemus; of whom it is said, That, after anointing Jesus, wrapping up his body in fine linen, and laying it in the cavity of a rock, they rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. Their view in this was to prevent the enemies of our Lord from going into the tomb, lest in their rancour they should abuse even his dead body. Therefore they rolled a great stone before the door of the sepulchre. In the same manner St. John says of Lazarus's sepulchre, (chap. xi. 38.) 'That it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.' Thus they securely shut up the Lord Jesus in the sepulchre, without entertaining any hopes that he would ever rise again, or come out of it alive.

2. Among our Saviour's friends were several devout women, some of whom had followed him from Galilee. For, as they had been witnesses of the death of our blessed Lord, and stood over against his cross when he gave up the ghost; so they are here witnesses of his burial. These women 'sat over against the sepulchre, and beheld where, and how, his body was laid.' They were the more careful in observing the place, that they might find it again; for they were in some measure strangers at Jerusalem. Now it affords us a further testimony of the reality of our Saviour's death, that these his zealous friends were so near at the time of his burial. For they never would have permitted him to be interred in the sepulchre, had they seen the least signs of life in him. But St. Luke further observes, 'That they returned, and prepared spices and ointment,' *i. e.* they went into the city; and bought some precious ointment and spices, before it was night, and consequently before the Sabbath began, in order to anoint the

body of Jesus the next day, perhaps more carefully than Joseph and Nicodemus had done, since they were straitened for time. These devout women were far from entertaining any thoughts of our Lord's resurrection; their design was only to pay these honours to the body of a person they had so highly valued, and to preserve it as long as possible from corruption. Lastly, the Evangelist says, that 'they rested on the Sabbath day, according to the commandment.' This shews their innocence and piety; since they punctually observed the law of God, and would not by any means violate it; so that their love for the Lord Jesus, which here as it were, strove for preference with their fear of transgressing the law, must have powerfully urged them, and, like a magnet, have drawn their thoughts to the sepulchre. Such was the behaviour of our Saviour's friends at his burial. We come to consider,

Secondly, The behaviour of his enemies on this occasion. These were,

1. The chief priests and pharisees; who did not let their hatred against the Lord Jesus rest even on the Sabbath day, though the devout women mentioned above, shewed their respect to the commandment, by resting on the Sabbath. His enemies went early in the morning of the Sabbath to Pilate, and, instead of attending to the duties of the day, proposed to him this advice: 'Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre may be made sure, until the third day; lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: So the last error shall be worse than the first.'

The design of this application to Pilate was, that a seal might be put on the tomb of Jesus, and a party of soldiers appointed to watch it. In order to induce Pilate to comply with their request, they alleged the following reasons:

'. The first was, the prophecy of Jesus, that he would rise again the third day after his death; which they had observed and retained better than his own disciples. They could not repeat this prophecy without an invective against Jesus, though he was dead, for they call him a deceiver. But this circumstance of their extreme caution, even after his death, concerning him, whom they exclaim against as a deceiver and false prophet, shews that they had in reality quite another opinion of Jesus, though this testimony of their conscience was at present suppressed.

The second reason that they alleged was, their apprehension that our Saviour's disciples would commit some fraud, would come clandestinely and roll away the stone, carry the body away, and lay it in some other unknown sepulchre; and then spread about a report that he was risen from the dead. Thus the innocent disciples were, like their Lord and master, looked upon as evil-doers and impostors. They had been hitherto accounted a simple, and timorous set of men; but now, such stratagems are apprehended from them, as required great address, courage, and resolution. These false ideas concerning our blessed Lord's disciples proceeded from an ill-grounded fear. This fear had conjured up phantoms and chimeras before their eyes; though they accused the Christians of being the most visionary set of people in the world.

The third reason they alleged to induce Pilate to secure the sepulchre, was the danger, that 'the last error would be worse than the first.' That is, the report of Jesus being risen again on the third day would, probably, have a worse effect on the people, than his preaching while alive. Thus, these hypocrites intended to oppose the decree of God concerning the resurrection of our blessed Saviour, in order to justify their wicked proceedings in the eyes of the world. But we may reckon among the enemies of the blessed Jesus,

2. Pilate, the Roman governor, with whom the rulers of the Jews in this transaction 'take counsel

against the Lord, and against his Messiah or Anointed,' (Psalm ii. 2. Acts iv. 25, 26, 27.) As he had before been prevailed on by these rulers to order the crucifixion of Jesus; so he is now further solicited by them, to endeavour to prevent his resurrection from the dead. It was not indeed his own interest, that it should be said he had allov ed of the crucifixion of so innocent and holy a man, who afterwards rose again from the dead. Therefore he very willingly consents that a party of Roman soldiers, at the expence of the chief priest and elders, should watch the sepulchre, and secure it in the best manner, as the Jews themselves should direct. The chief priests were overjoyed when they obtained this permission, and posted a guard before the sepulchre; and lest they should be bribed to open the tomb, they took the precaution even to seal the stone. Thus, they thought themselves sure of having prevented the resurrection of Jesus, and that they had secured his sacred body in the bands of corruption. These their wicked contrivances were predicted in scripture long before; for the Messiah is introduced in the Psalms, making this complaint: 'They devise my hurt, and now that he lieth, [say they] he shall rise up no more,' (Psalm xli. 7, 8.)

But O what a miracle of Divine wisdom! how deep soever the devil lays his snares, God baffles him by his own instruments; for all these dispositions of our blessed Lord's enemies serve only to confirm the truth of his resurrection, which his heavenly Father had long before sealed and decreed. In order to make his triumph more illustrious, God so directed contingencies, that the enemies of Christ should receive advice of his resurrection from their own watch; who now with ghastly countenances and trembling limbs come and acquaint them, that Jesus, without any human aid, had broke open the sepulchre, and come forth quite alive; and that at the same time a heavenly effulgence, and a terrible earthquake, had very near struck them

dead; so that they were obliged, as soon as they were able, to fly away in confusion from the sepulchre.—Such was the behaviour of our Saviour's friends and enemies at his burial.

By way of a closer application of this narrative of our Saviour's interment, we shall here insert a hymn, composed on that subject, and illustrate it with a short paraphrase on every stanza.

1. Thou, who my sins (a heavy curse!)
Upon the cross didst bear,
From thence wast to the tomb consign'd
By Joseph's pious care.

2. O glorious type, by which the curse
Is far from us remov'd!
By faith we claim the heav'nly prize
Laid up for thy belov'd.

3. Now hast thou drank the bitter cup
Of death, without a groan,
And cloth'd us with thy righteousness,
To stand before thy throne.

4. Thy sacred word, which never fails,
Prefigures things to come;
The lion's den, th' enormous whale*
There typified thy tomb.

5. Thou like a fruitful corn of wheat
Art to the earth consign'd,
Whence thou shalt rise, and with thee bring
The harvest of mankind.

6. Even in thy darksome grave I see
Thy dawn of glory shine,
Which in full blaze on the third morn
Display'd thy pow'r divine.

* Daniel in the lion's den, and Jonah in the whale's belly prefigured the burial of Christ.

7. Since then my Saviour did descend
Into the tomb, and thence arose,
He made the chambers of the grave
A downy couch of soft repose.

8. As in the font, I die to sin,
And wash my guilt away,
Grant I may rise, and with thee mount
Unto the realms of day!

1. Thou, who my sins (a heavy curse!)
Upon the cross didst bear,
From thence wast to the tomb consign'd
By Joseph's pious care.

Here our thoughts are directed from our Saviour's sepulchre to Mount Golgotha. For in order to reap any real benefit from the consideration of our Lord's burial, we must reflect on the character and quality in which he hung on the cross, before he descended into the sepulchre.

He hung on the cross as the Lamb of God, bearing both the burden of our guilt, and the load of our punishment and curse; so that by undergoing this painful, ignominious death, he might atone for our sins, and satisfy the Divine justice for the innumerable offences committed against it. Now as this Lamb of God was taken down from the cross, and deposited in a sepulchre, it is a certain proof that he has suffered all the punishment he deserved on our account; that he has discharged the immense debt, abolished the curse of the law, and by the shedding of his precious blood, satisfied the Divine justice. For if justice had any further claim on this sacred person, it never would have permitted him to be taken down from the cross, and honourably interred. But as God not only permitted, but even raised up a man of wealth and distinction to be the instrument of it, it is, as it were, a

public declaration, that justice had no further demands on the person who hung on the cross; but that the whole enormous sum of the debt of all mankind has been duly and completely discharged. This is a comfort not to be purchased by all the riches of this world; but it must be appropriated to us only by the medium of faith and repentance, and by being dead unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, (Rom. vi. 9.)

2. O glorious type, by which the curse
Is far from us remov'd!
By faith we claim the heav'nly prize
Laid up for thy belov'd.

In these words we are reminded of the following passage in the Divine law: 'And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree; his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day, for he that is hanged is accursed of God, that thy land be not defiled, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance,' (Deut. xxi. 22, 23.) That this precept alluded to Christ, who was to be hanged on the cross as a curse for us, we are informed by St. Paul, in these words: 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree,' (Gal. iii. 13.) What a wonderful ordinance of providence was this! While an Israelite was hanging as a curse on a tree, the whole community of which he was a member, the whole land of Israel in which he lived, was polluted and accounted unclean. But God, by allowing that such a one should be taken down in the evening and buried, signified, that his justice was for that time satisfied, by the punishment of the transgressor; and that the land, where God had thus manifested his wrath, was again reconciled to him. Jesus bore our curse on the cross; but, in the evening, he was taken down

from it according to this injunction of the Divine law; which was a token that the curse was removed, and the land was again clean. Now he, who by faith enters into fellowship with Christ, becomes a partaker of his death and burial, and all the precious fruits accruing from both of them. Such a person is consequently looked on by God, as if he himself had been buried, discharged from the demands of the law, and entirely freed from the curse. Know therefore, ye penitent believers who are in this happy state, that you are clean in the sight of God, and that there is no longer any curse or condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, (Rom. viii. 1.) The curse is abolished and done away by the perfect innocence of your Mediator. Your heavenly Father is reconciled to you by the sufferings of Christ who hung on the cross; and satisfaction having been made to his justice by your surety, he has discharged you from all further claims. Only approach the throne of grace, repent of your sins, believe in Christ, and obey his precepts; and ye shall inherit a blessing, instead of a curse.

3. Now hast thou drank the bitter cup
Of death, without a groan,
And cloth'd us with thy righteousness,
To stand before thy throne.

The burial of Christ is a kind of intermediate state between his death and resurrection, and serves as a confirmation of the truth of both. For, from the burial of Christ it is evident,

First, That he really died, and that there was no collusion in the manner of his death. Now if he really died, then it is certain that he tasted death, and consequently that he really overcame death. Hence it appears, that death had not an absolute power over Jesus the Son of God; nevertheless, Christ having encountered him, it was overcome by him, and swallowed up in victory. The Prince of Life has extracted

his venomous sting, which was sin. He not only triumphed over him by the cross, to his death; but pursued him even into the grave, which is his residence and strong-hold, and there, as it were, for the last time, bruised his head. But,

Secondly, It is likewise clear from our blessed Lord's burial, that he really and truly rose again from the dead. By his resurrection he manifested his triumph over death, and put an end to the power of death over himself; he demolished death's strong-hold, and set up the trophies of his victory therein. At the same time, he laid the foundation of our justification; hence St. Paul says, 'That he was raised again for our justification,' (Rom. iv. 25.) For as our blessed Saviour was himself justified in his resurrection, *i. e.* he was publicly discharged by the decree of the supreme judge from all further demands, from suffering any thing more on account of sin; so all penitent souls, who by faith are found in Him, are justified by his person. Now these comforts spring from Christ's death, the certainty of which, as well as that of his resurrection, is confirmed by his burial.

4. Thy sacred word, which never fails,
Prefigures things to come;
The lion's den, th' enormous whale,
There typify'd thy tomb.

Here we are referred to that part of scripture, in which the burial of Christ was both predicted and prefigured. That the burial of Christ was foretold in Holy Writ, may be inferred from these words of St. Paul: 'He was buried and rose again the third day, according to the scripture,' (1 Cor. xv. 4.) Thus, for instance, when it is said in the Psalms, 'Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [or in the state of departed souls] neither wilt thou suffer thine HOLY ONE to see corruption,' (Psalm xvi. 10.) It presupposes that the Messiah was to be laid in the grave, which is the usual place of corruption. Isaiah says, 'that the Messiah made his grave, &c.' and this likewise

contains a clear prophecy of the burial of Christ. But his burial is further typified in the Old Testament by two persons mentioned in this hymn, namely, the prophets Daniel and Jonah. The belly of the whale, in which Jonah, after he was thrown into the sea, remained three days and nights, and on the third day was cast forth alive, and without any hurt, was a type of the sepulchre of Christ, where he was to lie part of three days, well secured and uncorrupted, and from which he was to come out again alive on the third day. Of this we are assured by the Lord Jesus himself in these words: For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth,' (Matt. xii. 40.) But the prophet Daniel is a type no less remarkable.

For first, on account of his excellency above the other princes and wise men of the country, he was undeservedly, and out of mere envy, persecuted, and represented to the idolatrous Darius, as a despiser of his commands. Whereupon,

2. He was cast into the den of lions, the door of which was seated with the king's signet. But from thence,

3. He was early in the morning taken out alive.

4. He was advanced to greater honour.

5. His enemies were themselves cast as a prey to the hungry lions.

Thus Jesus Christ in like manner was,

1. Out of mere envy, brought before an idolatrous governor, as a rebel against the Roman emperor, by the princes and rulers of the Jewish people.

2. He was condemned to die, and afterwards laid in a sealed sepulchre. But,

3. He came forth alive early in the morning, and thus was delivered from the jaws of that lion (Psalm xx. 21.) which destroys all things living.

4. He was thereupon crowned with honours and glory, and exalted above all the works of God.

5. His enemies, on the other hand, shall be plunged into the pit of perdition, which they had dug for him. Thus God's truth gloriously displays itself in the burial of our blessed Saviour; and thus several prophecies and types of the Old Testament are accomplished by it.

5. Thou like a fruitful corn of wheat
Art to the earth consign'd,
Whence thou shalt rise, and with thee bring
The harvest of mankind.

These words bring to our mind what the Lord Jesus himself had foretold of his burial and resurrection. He alludes to his burial by these words: 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, and die, it abideth alone.' He then alludes to his resurrection, by adding, 'but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit,' (John xii. 24.) By these words our blessed Lord gives us to understand, that his death and burial were no less necessary to his resurrection, than the dying of a corn of wheat is to its vegitation and fertility. For unless the grain be cast into the earth, and given up to corruption, it bringeth forth no fruit; thus, unless Christ had died, and at least been laid in the place of corruption, he could not have acquired for us the grace of God, and a right to eternal life. O the transcendent love of Christ, who, by dying, hath begotten us again to a glorious and an immortal life!

6. Even in thy darksome grave I see
Thy dawn of glory shine,
Which in full blaze on the third morn
Display'd thy pow'r divine.

The burial of Christ is to be considered,

First, As a seal of his innocence. Thus both are connected together; hence the prophet says, 'He was with the rich in his death,' *i. e.* 'he was laid in the sepulchre of a rich man, because he had done no

violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth,' (Isaiah liii. 9.) As Jesus, during his life, was infinitely separated from sinners; so in his burial he was to be distinguished from the malefactors who were crucified with him, whose bodies were exposed to birds and beasts of prey, or thrown into a common receptacle for executed bodies, and half covered with earth.

Secondly, The burial of Christ is a mirror of his exaltation, in which we see the dawn of his approaching glorification; since some beams of his glory were displayed at the sepulchre in which his body was laid. At the same time, this is an earnest that the bodies of believers, after the separation of their souls shall rest in their graves under God's particular care, till their resurrection, and glorification, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, (2 Thess. i. 7, 8.)

7. Since then my Saviour did descend
Into the tomb, and thence arose,
He made the chambers of the grave
A downy couch of soft repose.

This is a very comfortable inference which is drawn from our Saviour's burial; namely, that our grave is thereby sanctified, and changed into a calm and quiet recess for sleep. Anciently the evil spirits in demoniacs made their abode among the tombs, (Mark v. 5.) and these were the ensigns of their triumphs, which, since the introduction of sin, they had erected among mankind. But since the only begotten Son of God has condescended to be laid in the grave, the sepulchres are become silent recesses for sleep and rest; and are so far sanctified by his short abode among the tombs, that even the angels of light are not ashamed to appear there, (John xx. 12.) Who will now dread the grave, since, through Christ, it is made as it were the gloomy passage that leads to the regions of eternal day?

8. As in the font I die to sin,
And wash my guilt away,
Grant I may rise, and with the mount
Unto the realms of day!

In these words we are directed to Christ's burial, as a source of comfort. St. Paul says, 'If one died for all, then were all dead;' (2 Cor. v. 14.) hence we may further infer, that if one was buried, then were all buried. For as the first Adam, in his fall, represented the whole race of mankind: so in the work of redemption, the second Adam, in his circumcision, crucifixion, death, and burial, was likewise the representative of all mankind. Therefore it is said in scripture of believers who enter into the fellowship of the blessed Jesus, 'That they are circumcised with Christ, crucified with Christ, dead with Christ, &c.' (Rom. vi. 4, 8. Col. ii. 11, 12.) To this fellowship with Christ's burial we are brought by baptism; hence St. Paul says, 'that we are buried with him in baptism,' (Col. ii. 12.) For as anciently the whole body was immersed in the water of baptism, and thus as it were buried and concealed for some moments, from the sight of spectators; this short continuance under the water signified that baptised persons are, as it were, buried with Christ, and consequently are entitled to all the benefits which our Saviour purchased for us by his death and burial. From this intimate union with the buried Jesus, a person that is baptised is to be accounted as one really dead unto sin; and as one who by Christ's passion has really made satisfaction to God's justice; so that neither sin nor the curse attending it, neither the world nor the devil, dare triumph over him any longer, since he is in Christ Jesus. But our Saviour's burial was followed by his resurrection; so we, that are buried with Christ, must also rise again with him from the grave of sin, and walk in newness of life.

Let us praise our faithful Saviour, who already, is it were, in our infancy has received us into the fellowship of his burial, when we could only lament our misery with tears, but had not words to express our indigence and request such a benefit of him. But let us, at the same time, enter on a careful ex-

amination, whether we are dead unto sin, and whether we are buried with Christ, and made alive to God.—The old man must be forever put off; the sins, which Christ once buried in his grave, are never more to be brought to light again. If we have already done this, let us with a godly sorrow again enter into the fellowship of Christ's death and burial. 'Let us mortify our members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness; in a word, let us put off the old man with his deed,' (Col. iii. 5—9.) Let us, as those who are dead to the lusts of the flesh and the pride of life, adhere to the fellowship of Jesus Christ and his cross. Let us be willing to be 'hid with Christ in God, so that when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we may also appear with him in glory,' (Col. v. 3, 4.) To this end, may the living God, for the sake of Jesus Christ his beloved Son, richly bless to us this and all the preceding Considerations, that they may bring forth in us the fruits of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

THE PRAYER.

O BLESSED Jesus, who didst submit unto death, and descend into the dark mansions of the dead for our sake, praised be thy name for these demonstrations of thy love. O make us the happy partakers of all the fruits of thy meritorious sufferings, thy death, and thy burial! Ever praised be thy name for the grace which thou hast bestowed upon me in the Consideration of thy manifold sufferings, from thy internal agony in the garden at the Mount of Olives, to thy descent into the silent chambers of the grave. Set thy seal to all the good thoughts, which these Considerations have stirred in our hearts; and may we in life and death, in the hours of suffering and intervals of joy, from thy PASSION derive health, strength, comfort, and blessing! Grant this for the sake of thine everlasting love to mankind. Amen.

APPENDIX.

THE

Prince of Life,

CONDEMNED TO DEATH.

A FAST SERMON,

PREACHED AT JENA, IN LENT, 1721.

By J. Rambach, S. T. P.

MAY the crucified Jesus, for his passion's sake, at this time impart to us divine strength and divine wisdom; and may he give us such a salutary knowledge of the mystery of his condemnation, as may awaken us to faith and repentance! Amen.

'In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die,' (Gen. ii. 17.) This, my beloved brethren, was God's just and solemn menace to our first parents, in order to deter them from eating of the forbidden tree. This prohibition was not given on account of any noxious quality in the fruit, as some have vainly imagined. It was rather from a paternal care, that God interdicted the use of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil to the representatives of mankind. These words are therefore to be considered as a judicial sentence, in which God declares to man that, on transgressing this his solemn command by disobedience, he would not only render himself obnoxious to spiritual death, and forfeit the divine life; but also would incur the whole penalty threatened in these words, and infallibly draw on himself both temporal and eternal death, as a just punishment for his sins.

How dreadfully this judicial threatening has been fulfilled, we are taught by sad experience. For we all enter into this world dead in sin, and deprived of that life which is from God; and we are by a painful temporal death to be removed out of it. Death rules and tyrannizes over all the descendants of fallen Adam, and spares neither age, sex, nor rank; and if no gracious covenant had intervened, this sentence of the Supreme Law-giver, 'Thou shalt surely die,' would have been executed on the whole human race in its utmost extent; and all of us would have been consigned to the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

But the compassionate love and tenderness of our Creator, who has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, with pity saw man, as it were, lying in death, and graciously said, 'Thou shalt live.' For God, immediately after the fall, promised to send his Son into the world, who should bruise the serpent's head, destroy sin and death, and recover for us a right to the spiritual and eternal life.

But by what arduous steps, by what amazing means, has this redemption been accomplished. It was necessary that this sentence, 'Thou shalt surely die,' should be first denounced against our Mediator, before that gracious promise, 'Thou shalt live,' could be made to man. It was necessary that He should appear in our stead, as the representative of sinners and transgressors, and submit to the sentence of death; that we might appear before the Divine tribunal in his stead, and hear the sentence or promise of life from the mouth of his reconciled Father. In this amazing instance, the delinquent is forgiven, and the surety suffers; and He, who one day will call the dead to life, was himself sentenced to die.

The end of our meeting here on this fast-day being, as the present season of Lent requires, to consider with seriousness and attention this important part of our blessed Saviour's sufferings, let us, with united

fervours of devotion, call on the living God, that he will be pleased to bless the consideration of this interesting subject to our souls, so that all of us may be richly edified thereby; and to this end let us call upon him saying, 'Our Father which art in heaven, &c.'

The part of the history of the passion, which is to be the subject of our present discourse, is thus related in the harmonized account of the three Evangelists, (Matt. xxvi. Mark xiv. Luke xxii.)

THE TEXT.

'Now the chief priests and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; but found none. Yea, though many bare false witness against him, their testimony agreed not together. At the last came two false witnesses and bare false testimony against him, saying, We heard him say, I am able to [I will] destroy this temple of God that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together. Then the High Priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what is it that these witness against thee? But Jesus held his peace, and answered nothing.

'Again the High Priest asked Jesus, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us, whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God: Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said; I am. Nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

'Then the High Priest rent his clothes, saying, He has spoken blasphemy, what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They all condemned him, and answered and said, He is guilty of death.

'Then some began to spit on him, and they did spit in his face. And the servants, and the men who

held Jesus, mocked him, smote him, and buffeted him. And they blind-folded him, and struck him on the face; and asked him, saying, Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, who is it that smote thee? And many other things blasphemously spake they against him.

'And straightway in the morning, as soon as it was day, the chief priests, the elders of the people, and the scribes, came together, and led him into their council. And they said, Art thou the Christ? tell us. And he said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe; and if I ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go. Hereafter shall the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the power of God. Then said they all Art thou then the Son of God? and he said unto them, Ye say that I am. And they said, What need we any further witnesses? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth.'

Beloved in the Lord! Among other glorious titles attributed to our blessed Saviour, that of PRINCE OF LIFE, which is given to him by St. Peter, (Acts iii. 15.) is a very remarkable one, 'Ye have crucified the Prince of Life,' says the apostle to the Jews. Our Saviour was, not only by his Divine nature, the source of life in the kingdom of nature, the kingdom of grace, and the kingdom of glory; but, likewise in his human nature, wherein the Father had given to him life in himself, (John v. 26.) Thus death had no claim on this glorious, this divine person, had he not by the grace of God voluntarily determined, 'to taste death for every man,' (Heb. ii. 9.) In order to hear the sentence of death pronounced on him, he freely submitted to be brought before the tribunal of man. Of the several circumstances relating to this wonderful event, we have a melancholy account in the harmonised text of the evangelists citied above, which shows us how the Prince of Life was condemned to death by the rulers of the Jews.

In explaining these words, we shall

First, Consider what preceded the sentence of death passed on our blessed Saviour.

Secondly, The circumstances with which it was accompanied.

Thirdly, What followed that iniquitous sentence.

O blessed Jesus, thou Son of the most high God, we intreat thee by thy bitter passion, that thou wouldest assist us with thy grace, that we may continually obey thy precepts, shun all evil, and, to our great edification, meditate on thy meritorious death, and the cause of it! and in return for it, though we are poor and weak, deign to accept of our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving!

EXPLANATION OF THE TEXT.

PART I.

We are, in the first place, to consider what preceded the sentence of death, which was passed on the Prince of Life; and this was,

First, The deposition of the false witnesses, and,

Secondly, The glorious confession made by Christ, the true and faithful witness.

First, As to the depositions of the false witnesses, we shall in the first place, enquire who the judges were, before whom those witnesses delivered their evidence. These, as the text informs us, were the chief priests and the elders, and the whole sanhedrim or great council, *i. e.* the whole ecclesiastical consistory of the Jews. This council was composed of the chief priests and the elders, to whom also were joined the scribes, or interpreters of the law; for in other passages of the gospel history they are expressly mentioned as composing part of the council, (Matt. xxvi. 57. Luke xxii. 66.) Of these members of the council, some were ecclesiastics, others were lay-men; but at that time both the priests and the laity among the Jews were extremely corrupt and depraved. As for the dispositions of the great council at the time of the Messiah, and their behaviour towards him whom the Lord anointed King in Sion,

it had long since been foretold by the prophet Zephaniah, (chap. iii. 3, 4.) 'That the princes of Jerusalem,' *i. e.* the chief priests and president of the council, 'were roaring lions; that her judges,' *i. e.* the other assessors and elders, 'were ravening wolves,' (and on this occasion, they assembled in the night like wolves.) The prophetic spirit likewise adds, 'Her prophets, or scribes and lawyers, are light and treacherous persons; her priests have polluted the sanctuary,' *i. e.* they reviled the Messiah, the most sacred sanctuary of Israel, (Isaiah viii. 14.) and represented him as a blasphemer, 'and done violence to the law.' So degenerate and base was the sanhedrim or supreme council of the Jews, which had formerly been so highly reverenced, that their decrees were looked upon as the decrees of God. Thus the most sacred and respectable ordinances of God may be perverted and prophaned by impious men. Who now will suffer himself to be dazzled by the high stations of men, and to be awed by the authority of councils, synods, &c. Since the Son of God is here unanimously condemned to die as a blasphemer, by a very numerous and august assembly?

Before this spiritual tribunal witnesses are produced against the Lord Jesus; for the evangelist observes, that 'the whole council sought false witness against Jesus to put him to death,' (Matt. xxvi. 59.) These iniquitous judges were long before determined to destroy Jesus of Nazareth at any rate, who had so frequently disturbed their carnal security; who had reproached them for their hypocrisy, pride, and covetousness, and by driving the buyers and sellers out of the temple, had curtailed their profits. Besides, by his holy and exemplary life, he had disgraced their worldly, sensual, and sinful conversation.

In order to preserve the appearance of proceeding in all things according to the letter of the law of Moses, and consequently according to justice and equity, they indeed produced witnesses; especially as the bles-

sed Jesus, at his examination, had himself insisted on this point, and required that they should ask them who heard him, concerning his doctrine, (John xviii. 21.) But St. Matthew stigmatizes the evidence by calling them 'false witnesses,' and their deposition a false testimony. It is therefore very probable, that they had either been subborned with money, or allured by promises; or perhaps they might, of their own accord, out of an inveterate malice against Jesus, or hopes of worldly advantages, come into court, and formally depose the impious fictions they had contrived. For where there are unjust rulers and judges, there will not be wanting abandoned wretches, who, for a morsel of bread, will be the tools of their iniquity, and lay aside all regard to truth and conscience. Of this the Messiah complains, by the mouth of the Psalmist in these words: (Psalm xxxv. 15, 16.) 'Yea, the abjects gathered themselves together against me, and I knew it not; they did tear me [or wrested my words] and ceased not. With hypocritical mockers, they gnashed upon me with their teeth. Mine enemies speak evil of me: When shall he die and his name perish?' (Psalm xli. 5.) Thus it is said in the text, 'They sought false witness against Jesus to put him to death.' This is predicted in the 6th and 7th verses of this Psalm, the meaning of which seems to be this: "When they come to see and examine my cause judicially, they speak falsehood; they gather together to themselves iniquity in their hearts, and endeavour to collect a multitude of crimes, which are only the inventions of their own false hearts; then they appear in court, and openly declare them as certain truths." In which words, the spirit of propecy has given a lively representation of the iniquitous trial of our Saviour, at Caiaphas's house.

The law of Moses, indeed, required but two or three witnesses to give evidence in the trial of a person for a capital offence; but here whole troops of false witnesses rose up against the soul of the righteous,

(Psalm xciv. 21.) However, all their depositions afforded not so much as the appearance of any thing, by which Jesus could be legally condemned to death. For their testimony did not agree, and one witness immediately invalidated what another had just declared. Thus God here fulfilled what David, a lively type of Christ, had once prayed for: 'Divide their tongues, O Lord,' (Psalm lv. 9.) Thus the purity of our blessed Saviour's doctrine, and the sanctity of his life, shone out with superior lustre, notwithstanding all the vile practices and black calumnies of those who were for obscuring his character. Our blessed Lord might therefore say on this occasion also, 'Which of you convinceth me of sin?' (John viii. 46.) Thus does innocence appear triumphant amidst its enemies; and it is a very difficult task for the persecutors of truth to oppress it, with any shadow of justice or equity. O the immense value of a good conscience, which braves the tempest like a firm and immoveable rock! for when the foaming waves beat against it, they only dash themselves to pieces.

However, it might be a just occasion of wonder, if hell should want engines for accomplishing any wicked design. At last, two false witnesses are found, (and these perhaps were members of the council) who confidently came forth, as if they had been sure of carrying their point. These miscreants depose, that they heard from our Saviour's own mouth, words, which contained a horrid blasphemy. They here alluded to the words that Christ had spoken soon after his entrance on his public ministerial office, which were still fresh in their memory; it being a saying which they could not well digest. Our blessed Lord's words to which they hinted at, were these: 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,' (John ii. 19.) Jesus in these words, spoke of the temple of his body, in which dwelt the fulness of the Godhead. He had foretold, that the Jews would indeed destroy his body, by death; but that, on the third day, he would again

raise it up by his resurrection. But these flagitious witnesses treated our blessed Saviour's innocent words as, in our days, the world usually deals with those of the witnesses of the truth; they scandalously preverted them, wrested them from their true meaning, and quoted them without any regard to truth, justice, or equity. For,

1. Christ had said, 'Destroy this temple:' But they pretend that they had heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple.'

2. Jesus spoke of the temple of his body, and probably pointed to it with his hand, when he uttered these words; but they charge him with having spoken of the Jewish temple at Jerusalem.

3. They add, 'that is made with hands;' words which our blessed Saviour never uttered: For he spoke of his body, which St. Paul terms 'a tabernacle not made with hands,' (Heb. ix. 11.)

4. And lastly, They falsely pretend that Jesus said, he would erect 'another temple made without hands;' whereas our blessed Lord only declared, that he would raise up the demolished temple of his own body in three days. This may be looked upon as a masterpiece of knavery and prevarication. However, even the fuliginous vapour of this black calumny, vented in a four-fold falsehood, could not obscure the innocence of the Eternal Truth. For after all, it is said by the Evangelist, (Mark xiv. 59.) 'But neither so did their witness agree together,' Their testimony did not agree with the sound and sense of the words, which Jesus had spoken; nor did they even agree with one another. But if they had absolutely agreed with each other, and proved that Jesus had spoken the very words according to the meaning they had affixed to them; yet that would not have been a sufficient cause to pass a capital sentence on Jesus, and consequently did not answer the purpose of the Jewish council: For 'they sought false witnesses against Jesus, to put him to death;' and for this the depositions

were not sufficient. For, supposing that Jesus had spoken these words of their temple, the greatest guilt he could have incurred, if he failed in the work, would have been that of an arrogant temerity; which is by no means punishable with death. But if he had made good his words, and within three days rebuilt them another temple, where would have been the great damage? What loss would they have sustained? Must they not have acknowledged this to be a proof of his supernatural and Divine power? Lastly, to allege such a crime against Jesus would have proved of no effect before Pilate, the Roman governor, who would have made a jest of it. Thus the Jewish rulers were preplexed in their wicked machinations, and confounded and baffled by their own witnesses, the tools they employed to compass their impious designs.—Having thus considered the depositions of these false witnesses, we come,

Secondly, To consider the glorious confession made by Christ, the true and faithful witness.

In the mean time, the High Priest, who, like a ravenous wolf, thirsted after innocent blood, grew impatient; and as his witnesses were of no avail to him, he goes about to extort a subject, on which he might found a capital sentence, from our blessed Lord's own mouth. Hitherto the Lamb of God, having with a silent mildness and serenity heard all these wicked accusations which confuted themselves, and the falsity of which was manifest to the judges own consciences, had retured no answer in justification of himself. Thus, by his silence, he expiated the sinful apology of the first Adam, (who was for vindicating himself against God's just accusations) and, at the same time, manifested his willingness to suffer death. At length the High Priest adjures him by the living God to declare, whether he is the Christ, the Son of the Most High. By this behaviour his design was, as it were, to bring the conscience of the accused to the torture, in order to come at the truth; not that he in-

tended to believe and acquiesce in his confession, but that he might make use of it for compassing his impious and bloody design. For it had long before been declared by the great council, that Jesus was not the Messiah or Christ, but a mover of sedition; and a decree had been passed by that assembly, to excommunicate all that acknowledged him as the Messiah or Christ, (John ix. 22.) Alas! how must the heart of the Lord Jesus been affected at this adjuration! He is here accounted a sly dissembler, who concealed the truth. He hears the sacred name of his heavenly Father scandalously abused; that awful name for which he had so profound a reverence.

And now, our blessed Saviour, the faithful and true witness, no longer thought proper to be silent; but made a good confession, though he well foresaw what a storm of wrath and indignation it would raise in the council. For being asked this question: 'Art thou the Christ the Son of God?' he shewed himself to be the person, who was come into the world to bear witness to the truth, (John xviii. 37.) and had said by the mouth of the Psalmist, 'I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest; I have not concealed thy truth from the great congregation.' (Psalm x. 9.) He acknowledges and owns the truth. And as John the Baptist, his forerunner, had said, 'I am not the Christ,' (John 1. 20. iii. 28.) Jesus, on the contrary, answers to the High Priest, in these words: 'Thou hast said, I am,' *i. e.* It as you say, I am the Saviour of the world promised by God, the true and only begotten Son of my Father. 'Hereafter, continues our blessed Lord, shall ye see the Son of Man, sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.' The import of these words seems to be this: "I now stand, indeed, before your tribunal, as a despised son of man; and, on this account, instead of giving credit to my confession, you exclaim against it as blasphemous. But I declare unto you before it comes to pass (so that you will not

be able to plead ignorance) that in a few days, I shall be quite in a different situation from that in which I appear at present. For, after I am risen again from the dead, I shall seat myself on my Father's right hand, and jointly with him, hold the reins of universal dominion. My Father, for whose honour you blindly imagine yourselves so zealous, and suppose that in condemning me to death you do him an acceptable service; He, I say, after all my sufferings and disgrace, will again glorify me as his Son, will exalt me above all angels and created beings, and commit all power to me both in heaven and in earth. After that, I shall appear in the clouds of heaven, as on my triumphal car, and will set up my spiritual kingdom, and manifest my power, before my friends and enemies. This coming of the Son of Man in his kingdom, some of you shall live to see, (Matt. xvi 28.) and shall feel and experience such proofs and tokens of my exaltation, as (unless you obstinately persist in your unbelief) will fill you with unspeakable terror and amazement." By this answer, our blessed Saviour refers his judges to a passage in the Psalms, (Pslm cx. 1.) and another in the prophecy of Daniel, (Daniel vii. 13, 14.) where the Messiah is described as sitting on the right hand of God, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

The same noble confession is repeated by our blessed Lord the following morning, when he is again brought before the great council, and asked the same question, namely, 'Art thou the Christ tell us?' Now as Jesus had before signified to the Jewish rulers the injustice of their proceedings against him, since they were determined to put him to death, whatever defence he might make to clear himself from their accusations. He a second time tells them, that 'Hereafter they should see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of God, and receiving power to shed abroad his Holy Spirit on his Apostles, and to set up his kingdom among Jews and Gentiles all over the world; but, at the same time, to punish and destroy his enemies,'

Hence, on the High Priest's asking him this question a second time, 'Art thou the Son of God?' he again answered, 'Thou sayest it, I am.'

O faithful Saviour! thus with thy silence hast thou atoned for our unnecessary words, and with thy candid confession our prevaricating evasions, if we duly repent of them, and believe in thy name! At the same time, thou hast left us an illustrious example confidently to declare the truth whatever may be the consequences, and to fear no dangers, nor even death itself, when we are called upon to bear witness to the truth. Thus I have shewn you what preceded the condemnation of our blessed Saviour.

PART. II.

Let us now, my beloved, in the second place, take a view of the circumstances which accompanied the sentence of death passed on our blessed Lord. In order to pronounce sentence of death, it was necessary first to prove the prisoner guilty of some capital crime, that deserved such punishment. We must therefore here enquire,

First, Into the crime laid to the charge of our Saviour, and,

Secondly, The sentence passed in consequence of that charge.

The crime, of which our great High Priest stood accused, was blasphemy. For when he had openly confessed that he was Christ, the Son of the most high God, and that, within a short time, he would sit on the right hand of his Father, and come in the clouds of heaven, as his triumphal car; Caiaphas cried out, 'He hath spoken blasphemy, what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy.' The sin of blasphemy consists either in speaking irreverently and contemptuously of God, or in appropriating to ourselves what essentially belongs to God; a robbery and presumptuous audaciousness, not to be thought of without horror. Now

as the High Priest took Jesus for a mere man, and yet heard him give himself out to be the Son of God, and, by assuming a seat on God's throne, make himself equal with God; he concluded that he blasphemed, and consequently deserved to die. That this dreadful accusation might have the more specious appearance, and make the stronger impression on the other members of the great council, the High Priest rent his clothes. This was customary among the Jews, as a token of extreme grief, or to testify their abhorrence of any blasphemous expressions they happened to hear. Thus Jacob rent his clothes on hearing of Joseph's death, (Gen. xxxvii. 34.) and Hezekiah did the same, when he was informed of Rabshakeh's blasphemous expressions against the God of Isreal. (2 Kings xix. 1.) This hypocritical behaviour bore an appearance of a singular zeal for God's honour; and the High Priest intended by it to signify, that his heart was pierced, and, as it were, rent with grief and indignation, by the horrible blasphemy which he had just heard. But in reality, this extravagant rending his garment was an outward act of the most wicked grimace and hypocrisy; for this iniquitous and blood-thirsty judge was inwardly glad at his heart, that he had got some foundation to pass sentence of death on the innocent Jesus.

Reflect, my brethren, whether our blessed Saviour was not in these circumstances to atone, on condition of our faith and repentance, for the hypocrisy of joining in the outward ceremonies of Divine worship, without the real devotion of the heart; of feigning seriousness and contrition, and strictly to keep fast-days, &c. when at the same time the heart, instead of being duly affected, with all this outward show remains depraved, corrupt, and unbroken; basks in the love of the world, and its sinful pleasures; and notwithstanding all these outward formalities, by new sins crucifies the Son of God afresh. Oh, that every one here, who finds this to be his own case, may humble

himself before his Saviour, and penitently implore the forgiveness of such wicked, such detestable hypocrisy!

Secondly, Upon this supposed crime the whole spiritual court of the Jews proceed to pass sentence. For when the High Priest puts the question, 'What think ye?' in order to collect the suffrages of the members of the council, they unanimously cry out, 'He is guilty of death.' They do not previously enquire whether the confession of Jesus is to be accounted blasphemy; this they take for granted, and declare him from whose mouth such words proceed, to be guilty of death. They make the Divine law the pretence for passing this iniquitous sentence; for it is said in Leviticus, 'He that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, shall surely be put to death,' (Lev. xxiv. 16.) In conformity to this law, [against which, according to the interpretation of the Jewish doctors, those who denied the unity, holiness, or truth of the Divine Being were supposed to transgress] they all judged, that the Prince of Life, by assuming to himself divine honours, and the title of the Son of God, according to justice and equity, ought to be put to death. And though the good Nicodemus and Joseph of Aramathea, if they were present, might protest against such iniquitous proceedings, and declare their disapprobation of them; (Luke xxiii. 50, 51.) it was to no purpose, they were out-voted by a very large majority. It was therefore decreed by the council, that he was guilty of death.

A few hours after, when the morning was come, this sentence was ratified. For as Jesus repeated his confession that he was the Son of God, the council confirmed their decree, and said one to another, what further need have we of witnesses, we ourselves have heard it from his mouth? As if they had said, since he has repeated his blasphemy, though we have allowed him some hours for recollection, and still persists in it, we judge it proper to confirm the sentence; as

he has blasphemed the name of God, he must die the death.

Thus did the builders reject that most precious corner stone, which God had determined to lay in Sion. Thus was the Hope of Israel, and the desire of nations, condemned by his own people. Thus was the Captain of Salvation, and the Prince of Life, sentenced to death by a wicked abuse of the Divine law. O dreadful and unheard of transaction! that the great Angel of the Covenant, who himself had given the law on Mount Sinai, should be condemned as a transgressor of the law; and that He, by whose spirit the holy scripture was inspired, should be declared guilty of blasphemy, and sentenced to die from that scripture. Let none henceforth take offence at seeing how often the witnesses of truth are still condemned to die by ignorant zealots, through their false expositions and misapplications of the holy scripture.

PART III.

MANY useful observations might be here made on this extraordinary sentence; but as the time allowed for discourses delivered from the pulpit will not permit, it is necessary that we should proceed, in the third place, to take into consideration what followed after sentence was pronounced on our blessed Saviour.

When the sanhedrim or great council of the Jews had passed sentence of death on our blessed Lord, as a blasphemer, the assembly broke up, for the night was pretty far spent, and left Jesus in the hands of their servants; who passed the remainder of the night in treating the Son of the most high God, with infernal abuse, outrages, and indignities. Concerning this circumstance it is said in the text, 'And the men who held Jesus mocked him, smote him, and buffeted him, and spit in his face. And they blindfolded him, and struck him on the face with the palms of their hands, and asked him, saying, Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, who it is that smote thee? And many other things blasphemously spake they against him.'

I sincerely acknowledge, dearly beloved, my incapacity to unfold this mystery of impiety, this work of darkness; nor can I form to myself an adequate idea of the monstrous indignities, which the Lord of Glory suffered during this night from the engines of satan. Only consider, ye devout and pious souls, that if a servant could, in the presence of the whole council, and all the respectable assessors, presume to strike our glorious Redeemer on the face; consider, I say, to what enormous lengths these shameless miscreants would run, when they had him alone, when he was given up to their brutal insolence, and when no body was present who would in the least check their inhuman rage. Unquestionably there were present on this occasion, a greater number of evil spirits than of men; and the former directed the hands and tongues of this riotous multitude, that all the indignities which hell could contrive might be put on our Redeemer. This was the black hour, when the prince of darkness and his apostate angels were let loose against the Son of God, and loaded the humble patience and gentleness of this Divine person with the vilest abuses and most shocking indignities.

Here that sacred person, who was to bruise the serpent's head, suffered the sharpest of its envenomed stings both in body and mind.

His exalted prophetic office, for which his Father had anointed him, and bestowed on him the gift of wisdom without measure, was most impiously mocked, and consequently his mind must have suffered extreme anguish. For his eyes being covered with a bandage, those who struck him with their impious hands said, 'Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, who it is that struck thee.' How must the heart of the blessed Jesus have been affected at this monstrous impiety! How many melancholy looks did he cast on these outrageous miscreants, but without any other effect than inflaming their brutal insolence! Sometimes his cheeks were red and inflamed with their in-

human buffetings; at other times, they became pale at the horrid impiety of these infatuated wretches, and the thoughts of the heavy judgments that were to come upon them.

Our blessed Lord must likewise have suffered in his sacred body; and every one of his five senses must have conveyed painful sensations, in order to expiate those sins, which men commit by the indulgence and abuse of their senses. As we so often turn our eyes to forbidden objects, and give a free scope to wanton glances; so he suffers his innocent dove-like eyes to be insultingly blind-folded and covered. As we take a pleasure in listening with our ears to lies and slanders, to profane jests and impure ribaldry, so he was obliged to hear the most horrible sarcasms and bitter invectives. His smell was offended with the stench of the loathsome spittle, that was cast in his sacred face by these inhuman wretches. His taste was offended by the vinegar and gall, which they afterwards gave him to drink. His feeling was offended by the strokes and blows, which he patiently endured; and all this he underwent to atone, upon our repentance, for all those kinds of voluptuousness and delicacy which are committed by the senses, and to facilitate to us the denial of all sinful gratifications.

But who can sufficiently admire the patience and gentleness which the Son of God shewed amidst all these indignities, mockeries, and outrages? Alas, how full of resentment are we poor, sinful worms, when, according to the modern phrase, our honour is touched! How do these men of honour kindle into a flame of rage, at the least uncourteous word! They make it a point neither to bear nor forgive any injury or affront; and the least offence must be revenged by a law-suit or the sword, and atoned for by blood. And he who should be so unfashionable as to forbear either the one or the other of these methods of revenge, would be judged a person void of spirit, and lost to all sense of honour. O wretched

ambition, proud madness and frenzy! How dare such men mention the name of Christ, who look on the imitation of his patience and gentleness as a scandalous meanness of spirit! For, according to their wretched notions of honour, they must account the ever-glorious Son of God himself to have been a mean spirited person; since he patiently put up even with blows and insults, without offering to avenge himself, or to make the least resistance.

Here the Lord of glory, before whom the cherubims themselves veil their effulgent faces, stands with his face bound and covered by way of mockery, and so disfigured with spittle, outrages, and blows, as not to be known. His ears ring with the most prophane blasphemies, the most virulent sarcasms, the bitterest invectives; and his sacred head, worthy of unperishable crowns and diadems, is struck and buffeted with innumerable blows. But if we could see into the thoughts of his heart, we should stand amazed at the placid tranquillity of his heavenly mind. No thoughts of revenge are harboured there; no invective proceeds from his sacred lips. 'He is as a deaf man that doth not hear, and as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth, and as one in whose mouth are no reproofs,' (Psalm xxxviii. 13, 14.)

All these outrages he receives, not as proceeding from men; but from the just hand of his heavenly Father, as punishments for the immense debt of our sins, which he, who was our surety, had taken on himself to discharge. This was not a patience and magnanimity merely heroical, nor a passive submission of a timorous spirit. On the contrary, it was a most perfect sacrifice to the will of God; and the most absolute willingness to fulfil the scriptures, to drink the cup of sufferings, and to glorify his Father's name. Oh, that this sight of the mocked, insulted, and outraged Jesus may shame our resentful tempers, and mollify the pride and rancour of our obdurate, unrelenting hearts.

APPLICATION.

THUS, my beloved brethren, we have seen the Prince of Life condemned by the Jewish rulers to suffer death. We have heard both the depositions of the false witnesses, and his own glorious confession. We have observed how he was condemned to die, as a blasphemer. Lastly, we have viewed him amidst the cruel mockery, and the inhuman outrages, of the brutal soldiers and servants. Let us, my beloved in the Lord, still dwell a little longer on this affecting spectacle; and draw from it some inferences, in order to induce us,

First, To express a hearty sorrow for our sins, and

Secondly, To encourage us to a filial confidence, and a joyful faith in God.

First then, it is to be supposed that Jesus was, in his own person, perfectly innocent and without sin; and consequently did not suffer all these indignities and injurious treatment for any transgressions of his own. For though the sanhedrim or council of the Jews declared him a blasphemer, and accused him of high treason against the majesty of heaven; yet it is evident to every one, that this was the accursed effect of envy and malice, and consequently the charge was void of any real foundation. For what an extravagant inference was that drawn on another occasion by these men who were his judges? namely,

'This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day,' (John ix. 16.) and even opposeth us who have the honour of God so much at heart. If he be not of God, he belongs to the devil, and as he belongs to the devil there cannot be a more horrid blasphemy than his pretending to be the Son of God.

But the blessed Jesus was otherwise manifested in the consciences of his enemies; as Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, confessed when he spoke these words to Christ, in the name of them all, 'Rabbi, or master, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou

doest, except God be with him,' (John iii. 2.) Our blessed Lord might with confidence say, to the face of his most inveterate enemies and malicious slanderers, 'I have not a devil; but I honour my Father, and ye dishonour me,' (John viii. 49.) He could in his filial and affectionate converse with his heavenly Father even say, 'I have glorified thee on earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was,' (John xvii. 4, 5.) Could a blasphemer dare to converse in such language with the omniscient God? And would God have raised from the dead, visibly taken up to heaven, crowned with praise and honour, and placed on his own right hand, a person who had robbed him of his honour, and usurped his prerogative? It is therefore evident that Jesus was innocent; and consequently deserved no sentence of death, no rude mockeries, insults, and blows.

Do you ask, my brethren, what was the cause of all those inhuman outrages committed against the Son of God? My answer is: Alas! for your sins and mine he was smitten and afflicted. Nay Christ himself answers you in the words of the prophet: 'Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins; thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities,' (Isaiah xliii. 24.)

As for the cause of his being sentenced as a blasphemer for making himself the Son of God, it is to be sought for in the fall of our first parents, of which we have all been partakers. Man, in the state of innocence, was his Creator's beloved child; but instead of being satisfied with that glorious privilege, he was for mounting higher; he was for attaining to the summit of Divine perfection, and being equal to God himself, the great author of his being. Seduced by satan he, with the most impious arrogance, sought to deprive his Creator of the honour and pre-eminence due to him, to ascend his exalted throne, and to seat himself there as an equal with God. But he thereby

became like the devil, at whose instigation he fell, and rendered himself obnoxious to temporal and eternal death.

Now for the atonement of these horrid sins, committed by the human race, the true and essential Son of God, 'who accounted it not robbery to be equal with God,' was not only to empty himself of his Divine glory; but also to suffer himself to be sentenced to death, as a blasphemer who deified himself. And this he did to expiate our presumption in endeavouring to make ourselves as gods by knowing good and evil, and again to acquire for us the glorious liberty of being the sons of God. How many thousands presumptuously pretend to be the children of God, and would fain be accounted such by others, who are utter strangers to the purity and holiness required in the gospel? To atone for this sin, if such men sincerely repent of their presumptuous arrogance and spiritual pride, the only Son of God was in this afflictive manner to satisfy God's offended justice, and not only to suffer his real Godhead, which he held of the Father by eternal generation, to be reviled; but likewise to permit the glorious character of his Divine Sonship to be ridiculed and reviled; nay, he suffered this indignity from the meanest slaves, on whom he himself had bestowed life, and breath, and power to insult him.

Therefore when we see, with the eye of faith, our dear Redeemer standing before the tribunal of the wicked, insulted and beaten by the licentious servants, and his awful and benign countenance covered with their loathsome spittle; we are not to suppose that all we have to do is to pity our suffering Saviour; to bewail him with lamentations and tears; and to express our indignation against the servants and soldiers, who thus treated him, by curses and execrations. For though they so horribly sinned against the Son of God, yet were they only the instruments to inflict those indignities, which our sins brought on him; for they

laid on him the iniquities of us all, and he was bruised for our transgressions. By our sins, we all assisted at this infernal carnival. By our sins, we also mocked and struck the Prince of Life, and, as it were, spit in the face of him, who is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person. Our sins were present, and consequently shared in the impious rage and violence, which these miscreants committed against the innocent Lamb of God.

Alas, my beloved brethren, did we rightly consider this, it would be impossible, that we should walk so carelesly and find such delight in sin! "Supposing, a malefactor (to borrow the words of Luther, who makes this comparison, in his sermon on the sufferings of Christ,) was to be executed for murdering the son of a prince, or king, and in the mean time, thou, O sinner, wert carelesly singing and revelling till thou wert seized by the officers of justice, and convicted of having aided the assassin as an accomplice to perpetrate the murder: With what agonizing terrors wouldest thou be filled, especially if thy conscience likewise flew in thy face, and confirmed the accusation? With much more violent convulsions ought thy guilty mind to be agitated, when thou art reflecting on the sufferings of Christ. For the wicked Jews, were the servants of thy sins, and thou in reality art he, who by his sins hath put to death and crucified the Son of God." But alas! what will be done to the sinner, since God's beloved Son has been thus rigorously treated? He experienced no clemency, or alleviation of his sufferings. As he had taken on himself the enormous guilt of our blasphemies, our haughtiness and presumption, our sensuality and depravation, and allowed that they should be imputed to him, as our security; he was looked on and treated no otherwise, than if he himself had committed these and the like sins, and consequently the innocent Jesus suffered the punishment of them, instead of the guilty.

Dost thou not see, O wretched sinner, the rigorous severity of God, and his insupportable wrath against the henious, wicked ways of men? And wilt thou still sport and play with sin as a darling bosom child, when so glorious a person has suffered so much, and laid down his life on account of it? or dost thou vainly imagine that the Son of God suffered himself to be sentenced to die, to be mocked, insulted, buffeted, and spit upon, merely to procure for thee the privilege of sinning with impunity? Dost thou suppose that this stupendous transaction came to pass that thou mightest have the liberty of doing evil, and going on in trespasses and sins? How vain and groundless is the imagination! for it has not so much as a shadow of probability on its side. The adorable person, who was crucified for thy sins, teaches thee to draw another kind of inference from his unspeakable sufferings: For when he was led to his crucifixion, he spoke these memorable and pathetic word: 'If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry? (Luke xxiii. 31.) If God has not spared his only, his beloved Son, when he took on himself the guilt of, and atoned for the sins of others, what rational hopes canst thou entertain that he will spare a degenerate child, who has forfeited his birthright, and is determined to continue in sin? Nay, can such a one expect any indulgence, as perhaps makes a jest of repentance and sanctification, and in the presumptuous depravity of his heart dares ask this impious question, "If I am obliged to lead a life of piety and holiness, what necessity was there of Christ's dying for me? What occasion is there for his imputed merit, if I do not sin, but lead a pious and godly life?"

Therefore, O sinner, forbear by an obstinate continuance in sin to spit on and mock him, who from a cordial love to thy immortal soul, hath suffered indignities, pain, and death; and who, without any reluctance or contradiction, permitted the sentence of temporal death to be passed on him, in order to deliver

thee from the sentence of eternal death. Wilt thou still take a delight in sin, the expiation of which cost thy Mediator so much pain and sorrow? Behold his sacred face swelled by blows, and covered with blood! Behold his eyes quite sunk and weighed down with agony and want of sleep! Stand a while before this affecting spectacle; and with prayers and tears dwell on the consideration, that the Prince of Life was insulted, spit on, struck, and even condemned to die an ignominious death, till thou art made sensible of the heinousness of thy sins, and thy heart is filled with horror at the thought of them. Let it be a matter of unspeakable grief to thee, that thou hast so outraged the Son of God, and as it were insulted the Lord of glory, and given thy vote for the sentence passed on him. Thus, the passion of Christ will lay in thee a true foundation for godly sorrow, and a sincere repentance. For, (again to make use of the pious Luther's words) "This is the proper, natural effect of our Saviour's passion, that it transforms men, as it were, into his likeness; so that as Christ suffered extreme tortures in soul and body for our sins, we also should, by the consideration of our manifold sins, be tortured in the mind and conscience. This is not the effect of mere words, but of deep reflection and serious detestation of sin. Thus the passion of Christ performs its proper, natural, and effectual operation; it mortifies the old Adam, expels all sinful desires, all delight and confidence in the creatures. Then we are grieved in our consciences, and are displeased with our past sinful lives. But (to proceed in Luther's words) he who finds himself so obdurate and insensible, that Christ's passion works no such pious emotions in him, ought to fear that he does not turn his thoughts inward on himself, so as to know his own heart. For the only alternative is this, thou must be made conformable to the image and sufferings of Christ either in this life or that which is to come. At least, these terrors will overwhelm thee on thy death-bed. Thou shalt then shudder and

tremble, and feel all that Christ suffered on his cross. O dreadful situation for a dying man! Therefore implore God, that he would mollify thy obdurate heart, and grant that thou mayest so meditate on Christ's passion, as to bring forth its happy fruits in thee." Let me intreat you, my dearly beloved, to follow such good advice; and be assured that you will never repent of it.

But we are not to rest here. When we are brought to a knowledge and sense of our sins, by considering the sufferings of Christ, we must again and again detest and abhor them, and again empty the oppressed conscience of them. And Oh, what an encouragement to faith and confidence in God arises from the condemnation of Christ! For behold, O pious soul, which art inwardly terrified at hearing the sentence of death passed on the Son of God; thou who sayest within thyself, If this be done in the green tree, what will become of me a dry and barren trunk? thou who couldest abhor thyself for having insulted the image of the invisible God; thou who wouldest suffer any loss or inconveniency whatever, rather than mock and outrage him afresh by new deliberate sins; Behold, I say, thy Mediator! Thou hast, indeed, deserved the sentence of death; but thy surety, out of his unspeakable love to thee, has appeared in thy stead, and has permitted it to be vicariously passed on himself, that thou mightest enjoy eternal life. He has endured the accusations of false witnesses, that the accuser of thy brethren might be foiled at the Divine tribunal. He was condemned as a blasphemer for acknowledging that he was the Son of God, in order to atone for man's impiety, who endeavoured to make himself a God, and that thou, through faith in his name, mightest be restored to the glorious liberty of the sons of God. He did not hide his face from shame and spitting, that thou mightest with joy lift up thy face before the tribunal of God. The mockeries and insults,

which he endured, have acquired thee a right to bliss and glory; and the strokes and blows to which he submitted have procured thee an exemption from the buffetings of satan.

Rejoice then and be exceeding glad! Dost thou with a penitent heart believe on the condemned Son of God? then shalt thou not be condemned. He has been judged and sentenced to die, therefore thou shalt not come unto judgment; but shalt pass from death unto life. Thy condemned brother is exalted to the right hand of God, and will one day judge those who have judged him; but as for thee, if thou holdest out to the end in faith and good works, he will set thee on his right hand, and introduce thee into his endless joy and never-fading glory.

Hold out still a little longer in thy conflict against sin, and suffer not deceitful and wicked lusts to have dominion over thee; for, in the condemnation of thy surety, sentence of death was passed also on them. Be not ashamed of thy Saviour's reproach. Rejoice when in following him, thou art thought worthy to suffer insults, mockery, and blows on account of his sacred truth; for he hath sanctified such insults and indignities, and appointed them as honorary marks to distinguish his followers from the rest of the world. Strive to imitate the blessed Jesus in his patience and gentleness, and pray to him, that he would impart to thee that placid, dove-like temper, and calm serenity with which he suffered reproach, and submitted to the most flagrant injustice. Boldly confess him before men, that he may also confess thee before his Father and the holy angels. Love him who has loved thee even unto death, till thou seest him face to face, when thou shalt eternally rejoice, and be transformed into the likeness of him who was once despised and rejected of men, but now shines in the most effulgent glory.